REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Goal 2
Achieve universal primary education

UNDP

The South Africa I know, the home I understand

Contents

2.1 Targets and indicators

Target 2A: Achieve universal primary education by 2015	**Performance summary:** Target achieved **State of supportive environment**: Strong
Standard MDG indicators	1. Net enrolment ratio in primary education[1]
	2. Proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach last grade of primary[2]
	3. Literacy rate of 15–24-year olds, women and men
Additional indicators	1. Adjusted net enrolment ratios primary education, male and female
	2. Completion rate of primary education for 18-year olds

2.2 Facts and figures

ACHIEVE UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION							
Literacy rate of 15–24-year olds, male and female[3]	83,4 *(2002)*	88,4 *(2002)*	89,0 *(2009)*	93,1 *(2009)*	100	**Likely**	**MDG**
Adjusted net enrolment ratios primary education, male and female	96,4 *(2002)*	97,0 *(2002)*	98,4 *(2009)*	98,8 *(2009)*	100	**Achieved**	**Domestic**
Completion rate of primary education for 18-year olds	89,6 *(2002)*		93,8 *(2009)*		100	**Likely**	**Domestic**

2.3 Policies on primary education and transformation in South Africa

In South Africa, primary schooling spans from Grade 1 to 7, and children are expected to enrol in Grade 1 at six years and complete Grade 7 at 13 years of age. This means that the appropriate age for primary education is 7 to 13 years, but while a minority of 13-year olds may be enrolled beyond primary (in secondary school), most children of this age and above may still be in primary school because of possible repetition of at least one class.
Grade 1 is preceded by Grade R. The pre-grade R phase is known as the Early Childhood Development (ECD); Grade R to 3 is referred to as the Foundation Phase; Grade 4 to 6 as the Intermediate Phase; Grade 7 to 9 as the Senior Phase, and Grade 10 to 12 as the FET (Further

[1] South Africa reports on Adjusted Net enrolment ratio as recommended by UNESCO Institute of Statistics. The problems with NER emanates from the incorrect reporting of age in the administrative records. Compounding the problem is the admissions policy that allows for ages 5 or 6 to qualify for enrolment in grade 1.
[2] While the indicator can be computed from administrative records, the latter carries inherent deficiencies impeding this activity. Administrative records do not track individual learners in the education system, making cohort analysis impossible
[3] All General Household Survey data used are prior to re-weighting. There might be some differences in the indicator values if re-weighted data is used.

Education Training) band. South Africa operates a compulsory school attendance band from grade 1–9 for all learners. From Grade 10 to 12, education is no longer compulsory and the learners may decide to follow a different path included in the Further Education Training band. In 2009, there were at least 7,118,653 learners in South Africa enrolled in Grade 1 to 7 (Department of Education: Education Statistics in South Africa, School Realities, 2009).
The population of 7–13-year old children was 7,019,633 (15,7% of the entire population of 44,819,780 in South Africa in 2001), and it grew slightly to 7,037,855 in 2007 (14,5% of the entire population of 48,502,063 in South Africa in 2007) (Statistics South Africa, Census 2001 and Community Survey, 2007: Interactive data from www.statssa.gov.za). The population of children aged 0–13 years constitutes approximately 29% of the South African population in 2007, according to the Community Survey of 2007, as opposed to approximately 30% for 2001 (Census 2001). The total number of those aged 7–13 years has risen from 7,053,377 in 2007 to 7,328,657 in 2008 (General Household Survey, Statistics South Africa, 2007–2008). However, the number of those enrolled in Grades 1–7 declined from 7,318,166 in 2007 to 7,231,660 in 2008, and to 7,118,653 in 2009 (Department of Education: Education Statistics in South Africa, School Realities 2009, www.education.gov.za).

The apartheid system had made access to quality education so exclusive to white minorities that education for all became a major and urgent focus of the post-apartheid South African government, which developed a battery of policies on inclusive basic education. These include:

1. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), which guarantees access to basic education for all. It requires education to be transformed and democratised in accordance with the values of human dignity, equality, human rights and freedom, non-racism and non-sexist;
2. The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act (1995) provides for the establishment of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) which forms the scaffolding for a national learning system that integrates education and training at all levels;
3. The National Education Policy Act (NEPA) (1996) designed to inscribe the policies as well as the legislative and monitoring responsibilities of the Minister of Education, and to formalise the relations between national and provincial authorities;
4. The South African Schools Act (SASA) (1996) promotes access, quality and democratic governance in the schooling system. It ensures that all learners have right of access to quality education, without discrimination, and makes schooling compulsory for children aged 5 to 16 years;
5. The National Curriculum Statement (NCS) embodies the vision of general education to move away from a racist, apartheid, rote model of learning and teaching, to a liberating, nation-building and learner-centred outcomes-based initiative;
6. The Education White Paper on Early Childhood Development (2000) provides for the expansion and full participation of 5-year olds in pre-school reception grade education by 2010, as well as for an improvement in the quality of programmes, curricula and teacher development for 0–4-year olds and 6–9-year olds;
7. Education White Paper 6 on Inclusive Education (2001) explains the intention of the Department of Education to implement inclusive education at all levels in the system by 2020. Such an inclusive system will cover vulnerable learners and reduce barriers to learning by means of targeted support structures and mechanisms. This, in turn, will improve the participation and retention levels of learners in the education system, particularly with regard to those learners who are prone to dropping out.

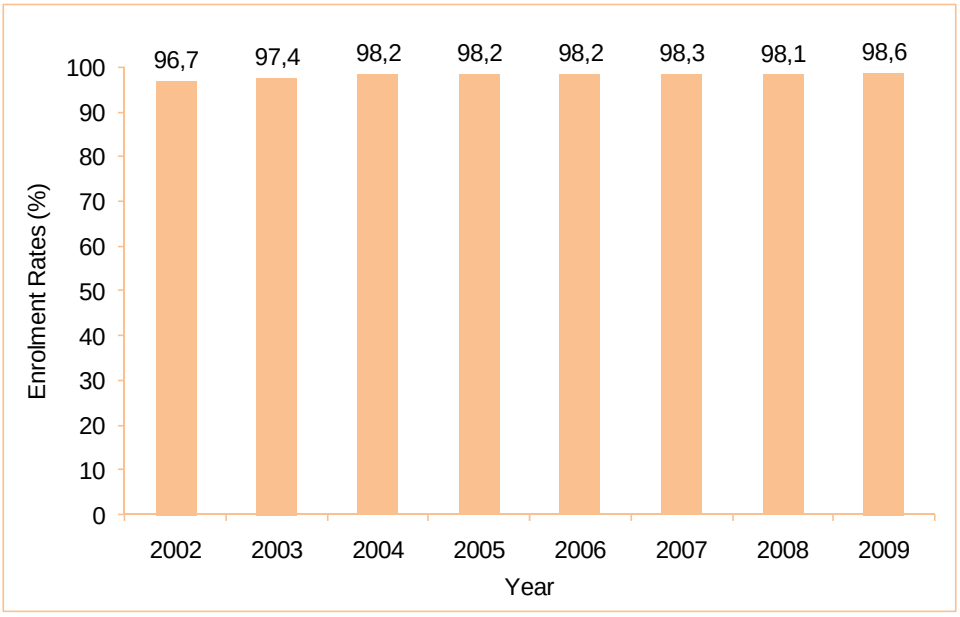
Realising the need to focus on quality education, the South African Government in 2009 split its Department of Education into two national departments: *Department of Basic Education* and *Department of Higher Education and Training*. It is the Department of Basic Education that is responsible for implementing the Millennium Development Goal 2.

2.4 Enrolment ratios

Indicator: Adjusted net enrolment ratios primary education

In South Africa, the appropriate age for primary education is 7–13 years, but some of the 13-year olds may be enroled beyond primary (in secondary school) and other older children may still be in primary because of possible repetition of at least one class. The Adjusted Net Enrolment ratio used in this report therefore considers all children in age group 7–13 regardless of the institution. Figure 2.1 shows the trends in enrolment ratios for the 7–13-year olds from the year 2002 to 2009. The enrolment figure, which is already very high, reflects an increase of about two percentage points from the year 2002 to 2009.

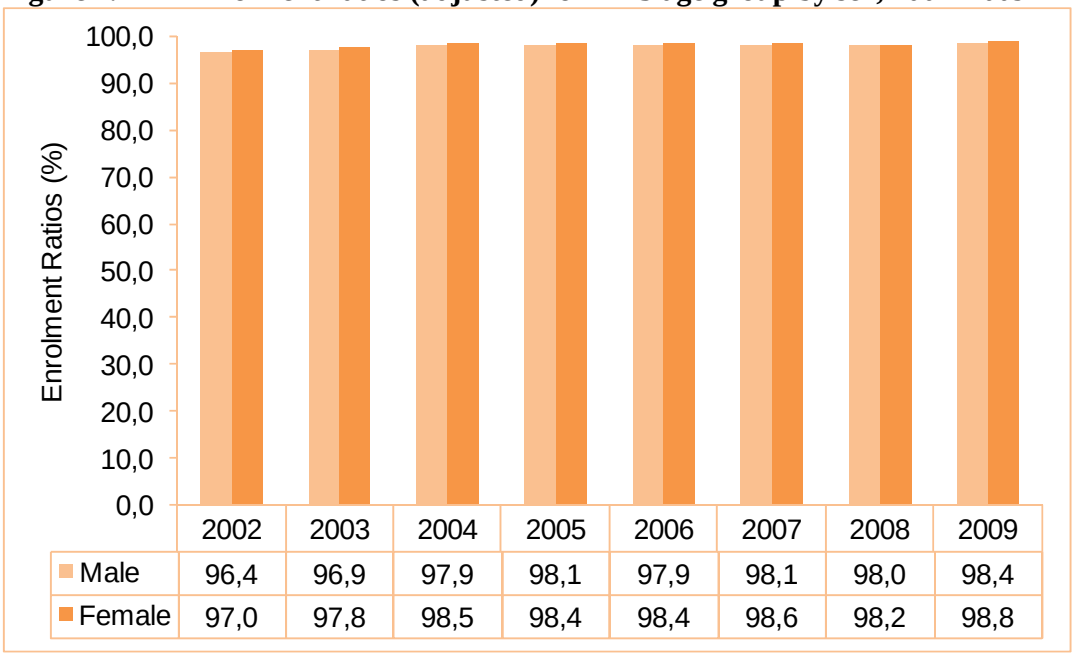
Figure 2.1 Enrolment ratios (adjusted) for 7–13 age group, 2002–2009



Source: *General Household Survey 2002–2009*, Statistics South Africa

Throughout the decade, enrolment ratios for female children have been slightly higher than those of their male counterparts as shown by Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2 Enrolment ratios (adjusted) for 7–13 age group by sex, 2002–2009



	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Male	96,4	96,9	97,9	98,1	97,9	98,1	98,0	98,4
Female	97,0	97,8	98,5	98,4	98,4	98,6	98,2	98,8

Source: *General Household Survey 2002–2009*, Statistics South Africa

Table 2.1 presents the Adjusted Net Enrolment ratios by province from 2002 to 2008. There were no significant disparities in enrolment across the provinces, although it would seem that Northern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and the North West provinces improved more rapidly at the beginning of the period, catching up with their contemporaries by 2005. The 2007 Community Survey data has shown uneven patterns of non-school attendance between provinces, with the highest percentage of non-schooling children found in remote rural areas, for example, where there is child labour in farms and farm schools have been closed.[4]

Disability is one major reason why some children are not attending school. According to data from the Community Survey 2007, of the total children with disability, 22% were not attending school

Table 2.1 Adjusted Net Enrolment by province, 2002-2008

Province	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Western Cape	98,3	97,6	99,0	98,7	99,4	99,4	97,8
Eastern Cape	96,4	96,0	97,4	97,8	97,7	98,0	98,4
Northern Cape	94,3	96,2	97,6	98,5	98,8	99,0	98,1
Free State	97,7	97,4	96,7	98,7	99,1	99,1	98,3
KwaZulu-Natal	95,0	96,8	97,4	98,0	97,2	98,1	97,9
North West	95,7	97,1	98,0	96,1	96,9	98,1	97,5
Gauteng	98,0	98,7	99,4	98,8	98,7	97,8	98,4
Mpumalanga	97,6	98,3	98,8	97,7	98,1	98,3	98,0
Limpopo	97,7	98,2	99,1	99,1	99,0	98,7	98,2
RSA	96,7	97,4	98,2	98,2	98,2	98,3	98,1

Source: *General Household Survey, 2002–2008*, Statistics South Africa

[4] Fleisch B, Shindler J, Perry H, 2010

The age-specific enrolment ratio provides a measure of 7–13-year olds that are enroled in education institutions, irrespective of whether it is a primary or secondary school. According to the data from the GHS, most enrolment ratios beyond the age of 8 years have been over 98%, with an increasing, albeit small, trend from 2002 to 2009 (see Table 2.1). In fact, since 2007, enrolments for both girls and boys aged 7–13 years exceed 98%, indicating a positive sign of improvement.

Table 2.2 Percentage of 7–13-year olds enrolled/attending school by sex, 2002–2009

Age in single year		2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
7	Male	89,7	91,5	96,5	95,9	95,6	96,5	95,1	97,6
	Female	92,3	93,7	97,2	96,2	97,5	96,9	96,9	98,2
8	Male	96,5	97,0	98,5	97,4	97,9	96,1	97,6	98,5
	Female	96,6	97,5	98,3	98,1	98,7	98,6	97,0	99,1
9	Male	96,7	97,9	98,5	98,7	99,0	98,7	98,2	98,1
	Female	98,3	98,6	99,0	98,1	98,2	98,6	98,1	99,0
10	Male	99,3	98,2	98,7	98,8	98,3	99,1	98,5	98,9
	Female	97,7	98,1	99,1	98,9	99,0	99,2	98,8	98,7
11	Male	98,0	98,2	97,7	98,9	98,5	98,7	99,1	98,4
	Female	98,8	99,4	98,1	99,7	98,2	98,6	99,3	99,4
12	Male	98,0	98,0	98,5	99,0	97,9	98,7	98,8	98,6
	Female	98,9	99,2	99,3	99,0	99,0	99,2	98,8	98,6
13	Male	97,5	98,2	97,2	97,8	97,9	98,5	99,0	99,0
	Female	96,8	98,5	98,8	98,5	98,3	99,2	98,6	98,4

Source: *General Household Survey, 2002–2009*, Statistics South Africa

A lot of effort has been put into successfully improving schooling access to under 8-year olds with enrolment ratios increasing from 89,7% for boys and 92,3% for girls, at the beginning of the period to 97,6% and 98,2% respectively in 2009. The most significant increases have been with this single group, a sign of the impact of South African government's determination not only to enrol but maintain its school age children in school.

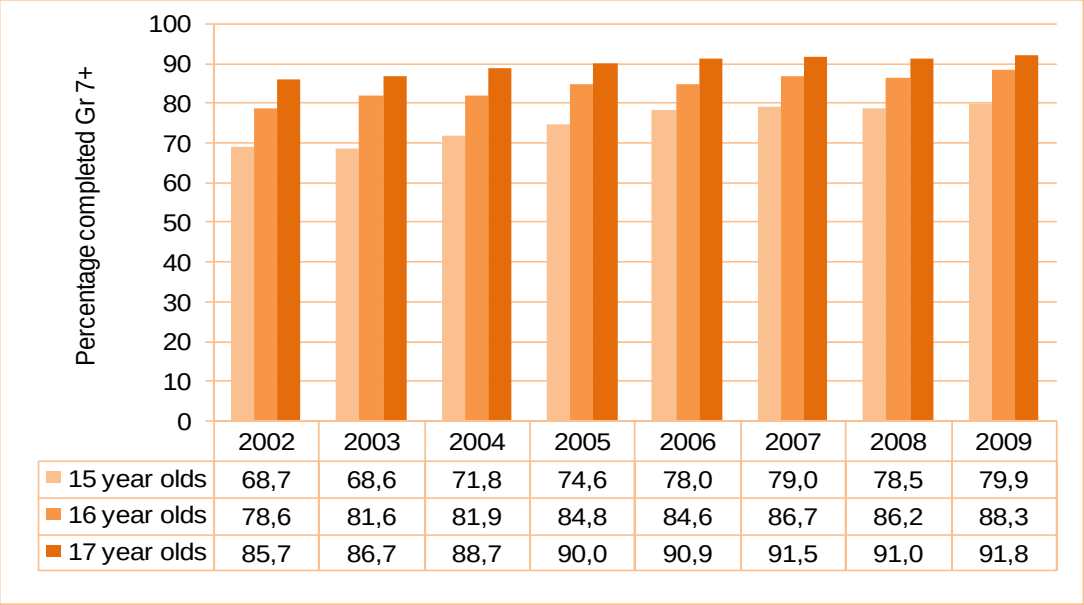
2.5 Completion rates

Indicator: Proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach last grade of primary

The proportion of pupils starting Grade 1 who reach Grade 7 may be regarded as a measure that could indicate whether a large number of pupils drop out of school before completing primary school. Class repetitions pose a greater threat to completion of primary education (Grade 7) in South Africa, particularly among boys, as evidenced by the proportions reflected in Tables 2.3 and 2.4 (in the next Section). Although children aged 13–17 years that have completed Grade 7 of primary school and higher would be appropriate to assess success in primary education, for South Africa, we will analyse completion of primary education using children aged 15–17 years. Figure 2.4 shows that the completion rate for Grade 7 and higher increases with age. This indicates that children in South Africa complete primary schooling at an older age than expected. The year 2008 has seen a decline in completion rate across all

ages, which may have been caused by a major focus on Grade 12 scholars who were to write the first NCS examination in the country.

Figure 2.3 Proportion of 15–17-year olds in South Africa who have completed Grade 7 and higher, 2002–2009



	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
15 year olds	68,7	68,6	71,8	74,6	78,0	79,0	78,5	79,9
16 year olds	78,6	81,6	81,9	84,8	84,6	86,7	86,2	88,3
17 year olds	85,7	86,7	88,7	90,0	90,9	91,5	91,0	91,8

Source: *General Household Survey 2002–2009*, Statistics South Africa

When those aged 18 years are considered, completion rates increase further for those who have completed Grade 7 and above, from 89,6% in 2002 to 93,8% in 2009 (Table 2.2)[5]. This is an indication that South Africa could be on the right track to achieving universal primary education by 2015, although some children complete primary education well beyond the recommended age.

Table 2.3 Completion of primary school (Grade 7 and above) for 18-year olds in South Africa, 2002–2009

Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
18 Year olds	89,6	90,2	90,0	90,2	91,7	93,2	92,1	93,8

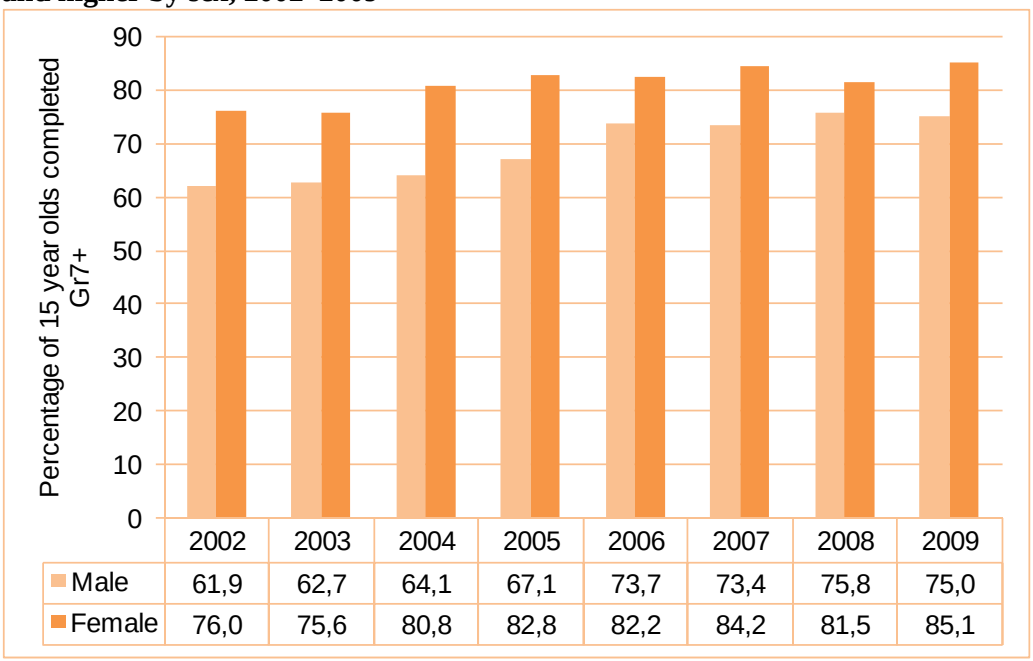
Source: *General Household Survey, 2002–2009*, Statistics South Africa

Figures 2.5 to 2.7 are employed to analyse the completion rates of boys and girls who have completed Grade 7 and higher for the individual ages 15–17 years, respectively. Generally, girls outperform boys in the completion of primary education. This realisation is observed throughout the reference period, 2002 to 2009, as well as across each age, 15, 16 and 17 years. The largest difference in out-performance by girls with regard to the completion of primary education is observed at age 17 years. Boys and girls alike tend to complete primary education at an advanced age. For the 15-year old girls 76,0% had completed Grade 7 in 2002 compared to only 61,9% of boys of the same age. By 2009, 85,1% of 15-year old girls had completed Grade 7 compared to only 75,0% of boys. During this period there has been a

[5] Data from the Department of Education analysed in the 2007 MDG report show consistently higher levels of this indicator (96,34% in 2004, 95,89% in 2005 and 98,01% in 2006)

considerable increase in completion rates (13,1 and 9,1 percentage points for boys and girls respectively).

Figure 2.4 Proportion of 15-year olds in South Africa who have completed Grade 7 and higher by sex, 2002–2009

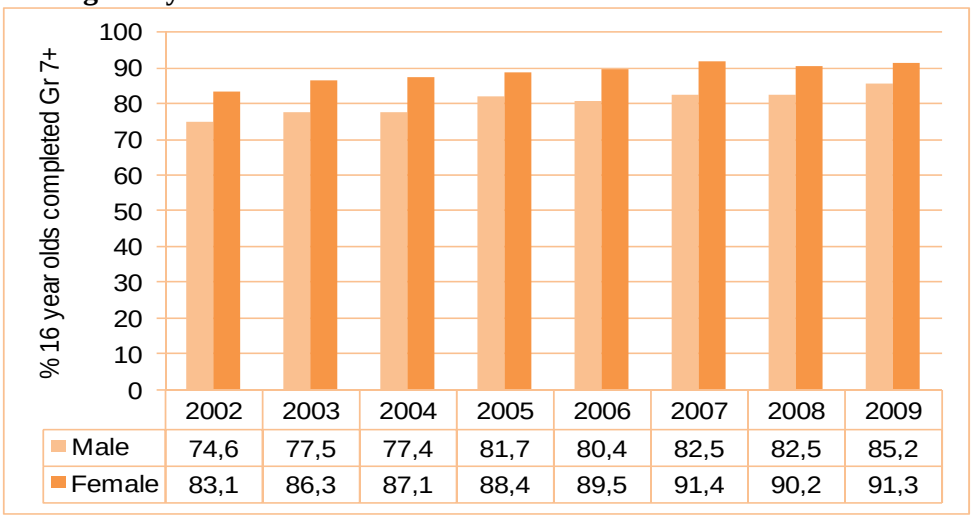


	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Male	61,9	62,7	64,1	67,1	73,7	73,4	75,8	75,0
Female	76,0	75,6	80,8	82,8	82,2	84,2	81,5	85,1

Source: General Household Survey, 2002 – 2009, Statistics South Africa

Of the 16-year old girls, 83,1% had completed Grade 7 in 2002 compared to 74,6% of boys of the same age. By 2009, 91,3% of 16-year old girls had completed Grade 7 compared to only 85,2% of boys. During this period the completion rates among 16-year olds has steadily increased (10,6 and 8,2 percentage points for boys and girls respectively), although an increase is less than for 15-year olds.

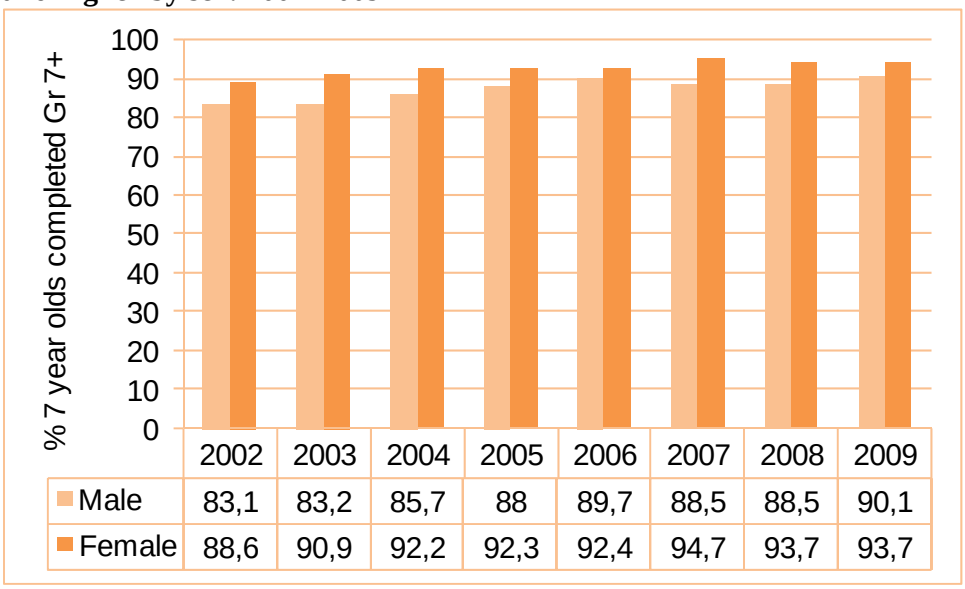
Figure 2.5 Proportion of 16 year olds in South Africa who have completed Grade 7 and higher by sex: 2002–2009



	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Male	74,6	77,5	77,4	81,7	80,4	82,5	82,5	85,2
Female	83,1	86,3	87,1	88,4	89,5	91,4	90,2	91,3

Source: General Household Survey, 2002–2009, Statistics South Africa

Figure 2.6 Proportion of 17-year olds in South Africa who have completed Grade 7 and higher by sex: 2002–2009



	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Male	83,1	83,2	85,7	88	89,7	88,5	88,5	90,1
Female	88,6	90,9	92,2	92,3	92,4	94,7	93,7	93,7

Source: General Household Survey 2002–2009, Statistics South Africa,

In 2002, 88,6% of 17-year old girls had completed Grade 7 compared to 83,1% of their male counterpart. By 2009, 93,7% of 17-year old girls had completed Grade 7 compared to only 90,1% of boys. During this period, there has been a considerable increase in completion rates (7,0% for boys and 5,1% for girls). The increase in completion rate is less pronounced among this older age group.

The implication here is that repetition at various grades within the school system could be the cause of the recorded low completion rates. Grade repetition has been recognised by educators as a major problem in South African schools. Unfortunately, evidence from censuses and surveys on this phenomenon is usually indirect. The National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS) provides the first nationally representative data on the phenomenon. It indicates that 57% adult and 25% child respondents have repeated at least one class[6].

Tables 2.4 and 2.5 confirm that grade repetition is actually a major problem in South Africa, according to the National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS). The highest repetition rates were reported in Grade 10 for males (20,7%) and Grade 11 for females (16,6%). African children were at a higher risk of repeating classes than other races.

[6] Nicola Branson and David Lam, 2009

Table 2.4 Percentage of males repeating each grade, Grades 1–12, by population group

Grade	All	African	Coloured	Indian	White
1	11,8	13,2	3,0	0,0	2,5
2	8,4	9,4	2,0	0,5	2,3
3	8,8	9,6	7,1	0,0	1,7
4	8,0	8,9	5,8	0,0	0,0
5	6,9	7,8	3,0	0,0	0,0
6	5,5	6,2	1,6	0,0	0,0
7	6,2	6,9	4,0	0,0	0,5
8	10,0	11,0	6,3	0,0	2,2
9	8,9	9,2	15,3	1,9	1,0
10	20,7	22,8	10,6	0,0	8,7
11	16,3	18,1	9,6	5,4	0,0
12	10,6	12,6	0,5	0,0	0,0

Source: *NIDS data computed by Nicola Branson and David Lam, 2009*

From an intervention point of view, the South African Government may need to expand on strategies aimed at tackling the root causes of repetition, which could lie beyond the education sector itself. However, it is observed that in the primary education grades, the Foundation Phase needs to be strengthened since repetition rates are highest at the foundation level, particularly for boys who seem to enter the first grade unprepared (nearly 12% of boys repeat Grade 1 compared to 6% of girls). African boys at Grade 1 record repetition rates in excess of 13%.

Table 2.5 Percentage of females repeating each grade, Grades 1–12, by population group

Grade	All	African	Coloured	Indian	White
1	6,0	6,7	2,8	0,0	1,7
2	4,2	4,7	1,5	0,0	0,9
3	5,2	5,7	3,9	0,0	1,3
4	4,7	5,2	2,1	4,5	0,0
5	3,7	4,2	1,6	0,6	0,4
6	3,7	4,0	2,8	0,0	1,5
7	3,8	4,1	4,4	0,0	0,0
8	6,3	7,0	4,9	0,0	0,0
9	6,8	7,7	4,0	0,0	0,1
10	14,2	15,7	11,8	2,9	0,0
11	16,6	19,0	4,7	0,0	0,0
12	15,7	19,4	0,8	0,0	0,0

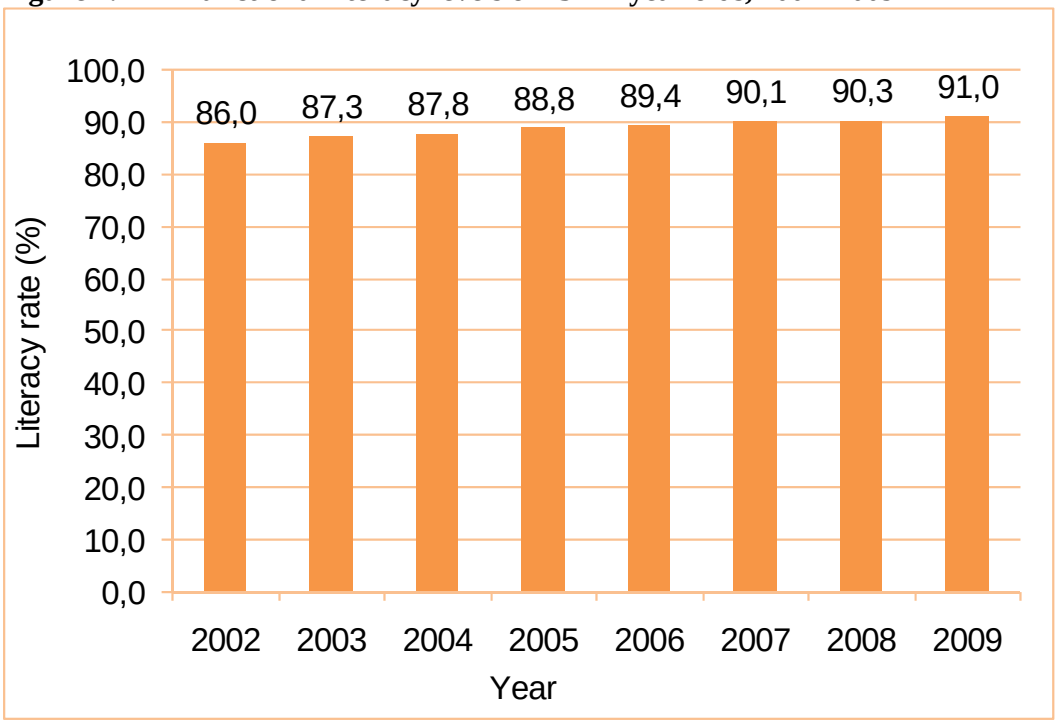
Source: *NIDS data computed by Nicola Branson and David Lam, 2009*

2.6 Literacy rates

Indicator: Literacy rate of 15-24-year olds

Functional literacy rate here is based on educational achievement up to Grade 7. Evidence from GHS indicates that the literacy rate among 15–24year olds has steadily increased in the past eight years. Figure 2.8 shows that the rate increased from 86,0% in 2002 to 91,0% in 2009.

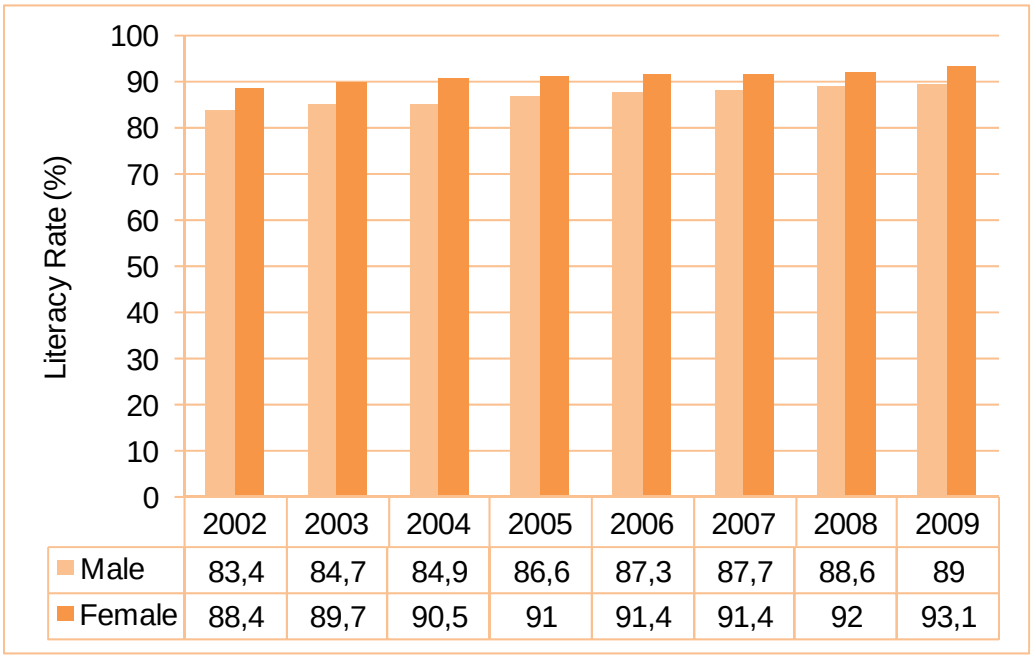
Figure 2.7 Functional literacy levels of 15–24-year olds, 2002–2009



Source: *General Household Survey, 2002–2009*, Statistics South Africa

Functional literacy levels for male and female youths differ slightly as indicated in Figure 2.9, with female rates steadily higher than male rates over the eight year period.

Figure 2.8 Literacy rates of 15–24-year old males and females in South Africa, 2002–2009



	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Male	83,4	84,7	84,9	86,6	87,3	87,7	88,6	89
Female	88,4	89,7	90,5	91	91,4	91,4	92	93,1

Source: *General Household Survey 2002–2009*, Statistics South Africa

2.7 Quality of primary education and transformation in South Africa

In recent times, the quality of education has become uppermost in people's minds, especially in the face of increasing economic inequality and polarisation of the country's schooling systems between the former predominantly black schools (majority) and the predominantly white schools catering for the minority of the population. A study undertaken by the Department of Education during 2003 on literacy levels among Grade 3 learners showed that, 61% of children could not read or write at the appropriate level for their age and that up to 18,5% of learners in some provinces already repeated Grade 3 because they could not meet minimum requirements[7]. In the 2003 Trends in International Maths and Science Study (TIMSS) organised by International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), South Africa was the lowest performing participant in both maths and science.

In 2006, the IEA conducted the second round of the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). PIRLS is an international comparative study of the (reading) literacy of young students. PIRLS studies the reading achievement and reading behaviours and attitudes of Grade 4 students in participating countries. Inaugurated in 2001 and conducted on a regular 5-year cycle, PIRLS 2006 involved students in 45 education systems in the world including South Africa. In the case of South Africa, Grade 4 and 5 pupils took the tests because of the challenging context of having multiple languages of instruction. Therefore, many South African children had one more year of schooling than their counterparts. Participating students had five estimates of achievement on each of the scales and subscales measured.

Russia was the top-performing participant in PIRLS 2006, with a mean score of 565, while South Africa was at the bottom, with a national average of 302. It is also of concern that 77,8% of South African pupils scored well below the low international benchmark score of 400 for children considered to be 'at serious risk of not learning how to read'[8]. Comparatively speaking, reading achievement varies widely with socio-economic status (SES) in South Africa, with SES explaining more of the overall variance in reading scores in the case of South Africa than elsewhere.

Available data confirms that there are two very differently performing sectors of the South African school system, commonly referred to as the bimodality of educational achievement in South Africa. They are the predominantly black (historically disadvantaged schools) and the predominantly white, Afrikaans/English medium schools. Not only do the two systems perform at different levels of achievement, but the effect of socio-economic status operates differently across the systems [9].

[7] Centre for Evaluation and Assessment, 2006, p.8
[8] Ina V.S. Mullis *et al*, 2007,
[9] Stephen Taylor and Derek Yu, 2009

2.8 Initiatives to improve the quality of and access to universal primary education

The South African education system can now be recognised to have attained near universal access. However, if it is to contribute to transformation in a meaningful way, serious interventions are needed to improve functionality especially within the historically black and chronically underperforming section of South African schools. In this regard, the government is scaling up already existing initiatives and developing new ones. Of special note are the 2014 targets announced by the Minister for Basic Education[10] which are:

1. The number of Grade 12 learners who pass the national examinations and qualify to enter a Bachelor's programme at a university will increase from 105 000 to 175 000;

2. The number of Grade 12 learners who pass mathematics and physical science will be 225 000 and 165 000 respectively;

3. The percentage of learners in Grades 3, 6 and 9 in public schools who obtain the minimum acceptable mark in the national assessments for language and mathematics (or numeracy) will improve from between 27% and 38% to at least 60%. From 2010, standardised, independently moderated annual assessments will be administered in grades 3, 6 and 9 in November and the results will be reported to parents;

4. Universal access to Grade R for all age appropriate children; and

5. Adequate learning and teaching materials will be developed and distributed particularly to those schools that have been identified.

Other ongoing initiatives that are being strengthened include the following:

1. Expanding the provision of infrastructure, facilities and learning resources at primary and secondary schools. More schools were provided with libraries and science laboratories to improve reading, writing and numeracy skills for Grade R to Grade 12. This is an effort to reduce massive infrastructural inequities inherited from the apartheid system;

2. Making Mathematics a compulsory subject through the National Curriculum Statement. More resources and relevant support were provided to the Mathematics and Science Learning Areas;

3. Developing a campaign focusing in literacy and numeracy to be implemented in 2010–2013 in the Foundation and Intermediate Phases, to ensure that all schools could offer quality teaching and learning;
4. Improving access of 6-year old children to Grade R to prepare them for the first grade.

5. Adoption of a policy on “no-fee” schools, resulting in 40% of both primary and secondary schools not paying fees in 2008/09. During this period a target of 60% of

[10] Mrs Angie Motshekga, MP, Minister of Basic Education: 23 March 2010

learners nationally achieved a no-fee status;

6. Providing free transport to learners who live far away from schools. In 2006, more than 200 000 learners in the country benefited from this service. Budgets of provincial education departments indicate an upward trend in allocations for the provision of learner transport;

7. The adoption of the National Schools Nutrition Programme (NSNP), which provides one meal a day to primary school learners. In addition to promoting the health status of learners, the Nutrition Programme also promotes school attendance by learners. In 2006, approximately six million learners (approximately 50%) benefited from the school nutrition programme. By 2009, the NSNP supported more than six million primary learners in 17,899 schools on a daily basis during school terms. This programme received an additional R4 billion in 2009/10 to enhance sustainability. There were also 6 503 food gardens in schools with about 26 408 food handlers working on the programme and receiving a monthly payment;

8. The Quality Improvement and Development Strategy and Upliftment Programme (QIDS-UP) was implemented in 2008/09. This is a strategy that puts learners' success first and it includes teaching and learning aimed at addressing key content issues and academic skills, the continuation of initiatives directed at enhancing South Africa's performance in Science, Mathematics and Technology, as well as the provision of education infrastructure support in the form of libraries, laboratories and teaching material, to schools. During 2008/09 financial year the QIDS-UP initiative benefited more than 15,500 schools with regard to the development of school infrastructure;

9. The adoption of the Quality Education Development Strategy and Upliftment Programme (QEDS-UP), which aims to improve education quality through the provision of resources, improved infrastructure and teacher development in the poorest quintiles of schools.

10. The establishment of a programme directed at girls, the Girls Education Movement (GEM), which aims to enhance the experience of girls in schools and ensure sustained access and retention of girls in schools;

11. The launching of Kha Ri Gude (meaning "let us learn") mass literacy campaign in February 2008. Government plans to spend R6,1 billion over five years to enable 4,7 million South Africans to achieve literacy by 2010.

A national Basic Education Action Plan called the Schooling 2025 has been developed. This will allow for the monitoring of progress against a set of measurable indicators covering all aspects of basic education including, amongst others, enrolments and retention of learners, teachers, infrastructure, school funding, learner well-being and school safety, mass literacy and educational quality.

2.9 Conclusion

South Africa has almost achieved the goal of Universal primary education before the year 2015. Considerable progress has been made by the South African government to improve access to Education during this decade. However, a lot still needs to be done to address the issue of quality of education, which can be seen through repetition and scholastic retardation at various enrolment levels for the majority of the children. Glaring differences between achievements by the girls as compared to boys also require some affirmative action to correct areas of inequality and improve the quality of education across the board for both boys and girls alike.

This brings up the key question "can schools alone overcome the difficulties associated with poverty?"[11]While education alone cannot erase the high level of poverty and inequality in society, quality education underpins the entire set of MDGs with improved education leading to lower morbidity and mortality, female empowerment and upliftment, access to better employment opportunities, etc.

While South Africa has made giant strides in improving access to education for all and attained near universal access, it is possible that this has been at the cost of quality for the majority of underprivileged pupils. Recent assessments of literacy levels have placed South Africa among the least performing countries, with most children scoring below the lowest overall international benchmark. In the remaining period to 2015, it is now time to redirect focus on the quality of education dispensed in South African primary and secondary schools. The current government is aware of the challenges and has put in place a battery of initiatives to improve the quality of basic education. Hopefully, these will yield the expected results come 2015.

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