

Maths essential to success of SA, Manuel tells pupils

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FINANCE Minister Trevor Manuel has stressed the importance of mathematics to pupils.

Delivering the keynote address at the launch of Statistics South Africa's Census@School project at Pro Arte Alphen Park High School in Pretoria this week, Manuel outlined the project's aims and objectives.

He also emphasised that although "mathematics was one of the most difficult subjects to teach and to learn", mathematical literacy was crucial for the success of the country.

The Census@School project, which was launched at the school by Statistics South Africa in conjunction with the Department of Education, will be rolled out in all provinces in the coming months.

Census@School is an international education project focusing on data handling in which pupils from grades 3 to 12 gather basic information about themselves.

This type of initiative was first launched in the UK. Apart from the UK and South Africa, Queensland – a state of Australia – also conducted the same project in 2001 and New Zealand did so in 2002.

The Census@School project aims to:

- Raise awareness of the national population census, which will take place in 2011.
- Familiarise pupils with the purpose of, and processes and concepts involved in, the national population census.
- Enhance the statistical and numerical literacy of pupils.
- Improve children's data-handling ability.
- Involve pupils in collecting data about themselves.
- Provide data and contextual material for teachers and pupils to use.

Questions about the pupil's age, the type of dwelling the pupil



Trevor Manuel has told a group of schoolchildren that he battled with maths until he got a good teacher.

lives in, the goods and services the pupil has access to at home, the type of transport used by the pupil to travel to and from school, and what the pupil's favourite subject is are asked in the questionnaire.

Manuel said because mathematical literacy was very important for the country, the Census@School project would only take this skill forward.

"People create a mental block when it comes to mathematics, because it is so hard. From the time I was 13 years old till I was around 16, I battled with mathematics as well."

"Then I found a teacher who reintroduced mathematics to me and from there on I found my feet."

"It is very important for all of these children and the youth of South Africa to become involved in this Census@School project," he added.

"Another thing that is in the process of being done is upgrading the skills of our teachers. This will create higher mathematical skills."

Manuel urged pupils at Pro Arte to provide the government

with feedback on the census because it is the first school to have the project.

"We want to know if we are asking the right questions. If we are not, then we will not be getting the right answers and, therefore, we will be heading in the wrong direction," said the Finance Minister.

Statistician-general Pali Lehohla said the project would broaden the scope of knowledge about South Africa's population.

"The project is also important for the development of mathematics. This development can only be helped by introducing statistics as a subject in our schools," said Lehohla.

He said Stats SA encouraged all young people to become involved in the project so as to create a better future.

Pro Arte principal Johann Güldenpfennig said the school was honoured to be part of the launch and to have been chosen to host the occasion.

"For our school to get involved in the process is very important, for us and for every pupil as well," he said.