

# Archway Foundation says huge school hall shortfall aggravated by new school plans

## Call for reinstatement of WCED funding to provide essential halls

The lack of school halls at schools in disadvantaged areas remains a challenge that is largely unaddressed by the Western Cape Education Department.

It is vital that education authorities throw their weight behind supporting irrefutable evidence that school halls are not just a 'nice to have'. They are as essential to the holistic, effective education of South African children as classrooms.

John Matthews, CEO of Garden Cities, whose Archway Foundation has in the past eight years spent more than R70 million on building 40 halls for schools in disadvantaged areas of the Western Cape, says the shortfall of 700 halls identified at the start, is now much bigger than before. **"Now, over 80 new or rebuilt schools are planned for the province, which is commendable, but there is no plan to assist many existing schools that have no facilities."**

Matthews made the issue of school halls the priority of his company's social responsibility programme when he took up office as CEO of Garden Cities eight years ago. He says that the Archway Foundation remains as steadfast in its mission as when it first started. The board of directors has continued to vote a substantial slice of the company's annual, after-tax earnings to the construction of the halls.

"We haven't wavered, even in the face of what appears to be a reversal of the Western Cape Education Department's policy, to provide funds for the provision of halls both in existing schools and those still to be built. In recent years, we could partner the WCED by building the halls they had budgeted for but didn't have the resources to build, in addition to those we ourselves funded. Now the building of school halls is not even identified in the budget," says Matthews.

**"It is of major concern that huge inequality in education facilities still remains in the Western Cape and throughout South Africa. We are trying**

to mitigate this in some way, but when it appears that our determination to provide equal chances for as many kids as possible is not apparently shared, then one has to question the vision and commitment of those in authority."

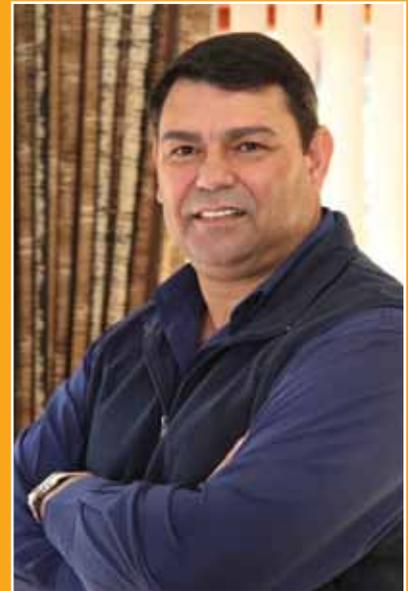
Matthews says that until you have experienced going to a school where assemblies have to be held outdoors in the rain, wind, heat and cold, you cannot imagine how much a school hall is needed. He attended such a school, as hundreds still have to do today, which was forced to hire community halls for school concerts, exams, and just about everything that is essential to a proper school life.

"It's on record that I pledged then, that I would do everything I could to prevent other kids from having to put up with that. It is undignified and not in keeping with a caring, nurturing education system," he says.

"The problem exists both for urban and rural schools where the need is enormous," says Matthews. "We do get financial support from other corporates but we need many more to come on board. More importantly we need the partnership with the WCED to be reinstated as it was before, if we are going to have any hope of redressing the backlog of school halls for over one million children in this century."

The Archway Foundation also co-operates financially with the University of the Western Cape to help provide science laboratories for disadvantaged schools, and will soon be in talks with UCT on a similar project.

**"This is not a baseless whim – it is grounded in overwhelming evidence that children progress better if they are equipped with facilities that are conducive to effective learning.** To test our belief, we undertook a huge survey earlier this year from which emerged a unanimous opinion from every respondent that school halls are vital if we are to improve the standard of education in South Africa."



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JOHN MATTHEWS



Garden Cities

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