



Riverview Preparatory School

History of Riverview Preparatory School

During a social get-together near Hectorspruit sometime in May 1996, a couple of parents started discussing education in general and the future of English primary school education in the Onderberg region.

One of the parents at this gathering asked, "Why don't we start our own English-medium school?" (Few people present would have thought it possible that this remark would lead to the establishment of the first independent English-medium school in the region less than ten months later, in January 1997).

To test whether other parents held similar views on the future of education, a meeting was scheduled at Tulloh Farm in Hectorspruit in June 1996. At this meeting, it soon became apparent that many parents had shared concerns and for the first time it was agreed that a confirmed number of 36 children would be the minimum number of pupils required to warrant the establishment of the school.

What followed was a recruitment exercise that required all interested parents to commit themselves to the establishment of a school. By August 1996, 38 pupils had enrolled and the parents elected a Management Board that was tasked with the establishment of the school.

None of the members of the first Management Board had any notable previous experience in establishing a school. All of them, however had one thing in common; a passionate belief in the viability of our own independent English-medium school.



Colin Rhodes (standing) and André Schoeman (left) addressing the future parents

Having received the green light, the board's first order of business was to secure school buildings. In this regard, the Balcomb Group was kind enough to lease one of the houses on their Tulloh Estate to the board. The board also started interviewing and recruiting teachers - which was no easy task, as the success of the school would depend on how these teachers shared the parents' vision. We were, however, very fortunate, in employing Gill Brokensha (Grade 1), Coco van Aardt (Grade 4,5 & 6), Anne-Marie Kalwa (Grade 2 &3) and Debbie Fisher (Pre-school & Grade 00).



The Balcomb's residence at Tulloh Farms which was used as the first classrooms.



Riverview Preparatory School's first Pre-school class in 1997

By early November 1996, the pupil numbers had grown to 44. By this time, the board was busy finalising budgets and first year school fees, school uniforms, buying or building the basic education equipment and were thrashing out an early education policy and standards. On 14 January 1997, Riverview Preparatory School, a dream but months before, started educating 57 children of a small but committed group of parents.

A New Era – Buying the Farm

The rapid, but very welcome growth of Riverview Preparatory School meant that by the beginning of 1998, it was clear that the school premises, at that stage the Tulloh Farmhouse, would no longer be able to accommodate the growing number of pupils and new classes.

Classroom space was running out and the facilities were not coping with the increasing demand.

The Board of Governors set the goal of procuring a suitable piece of land and building the school, even though there was very little capital. To finance the school, it was decided to implement a debenture scheme, whereby each pupil had to buy a debenture. The funds generated from this would then be used to buy land off the Jeppes Reef Road near Mauricedale Farm.

Quite a few meetings were held in conjunction with the parents to evaluate the various sites. As it turns out the site adjacent to the Malelane Country Club, proved to be the most popular and most cost effective. However, due to a misunderstanding between the Malelane Country Club and the landowners, then TSB, this piece of land was withdrawn.

Shortly after this setback, the board became aware of a small farm, just off the N4, approximately three kilometres west of Malelane, that had been put up for sale. When they visited the farm, its potential as a future home for Riverview Preparatory School soon became clear. The farm consisted of a large farmhouse and a number of outbuildings that could easily be converted into classrooms. In addition, there was ample room for sports fields and the 18 hectares of cane on the farm could serve as a valuable source of income for the school.

To everyone involved, the deal made sense. After obtaining the go-ahead from the parents, the debenture scheme was finalised, which enabled the farm to be purchased, thereby ensuring the future growth of Riverview Preparatory School.

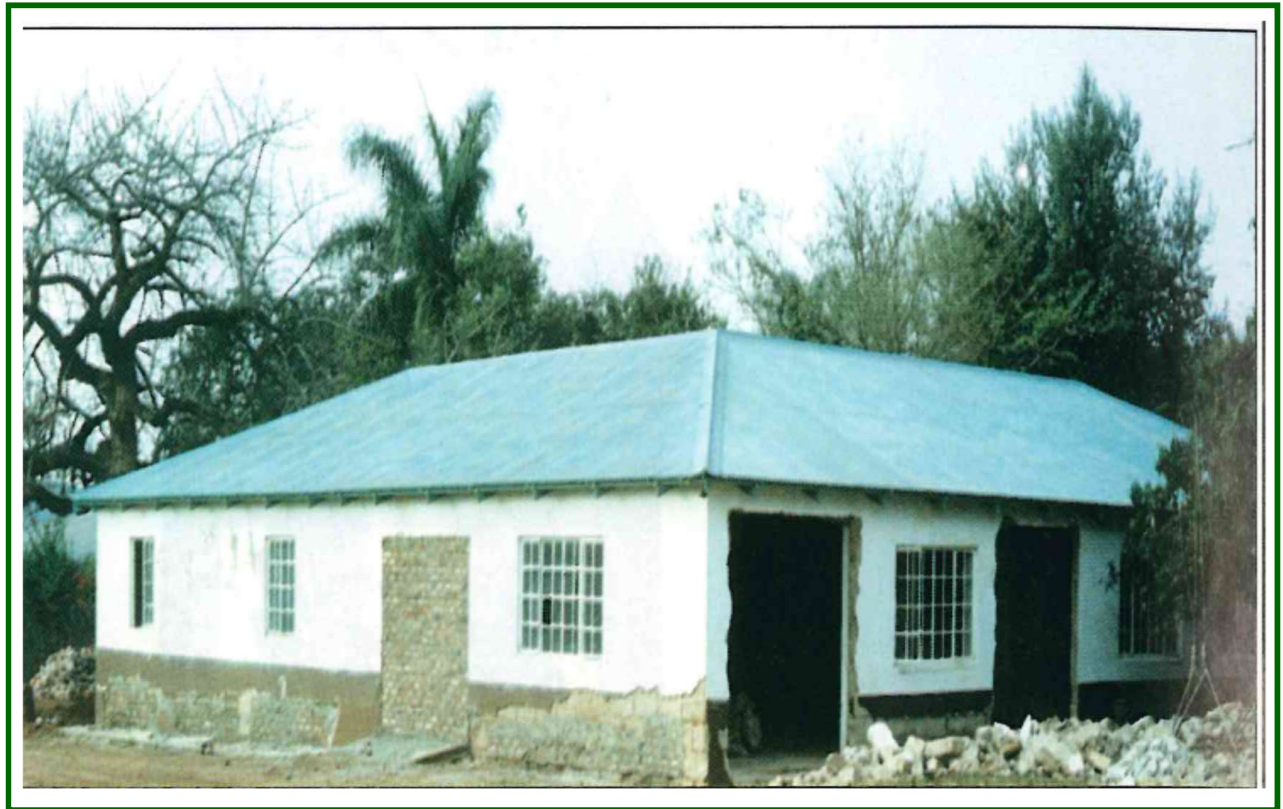
From Farmyard to School in 3 months (by André Schoeman)

I was elected as chairman of the Building & Renovating Sub-Committee and had to oversee the transformation of a farmhouse and outbuildings, to a proper school in only three months!

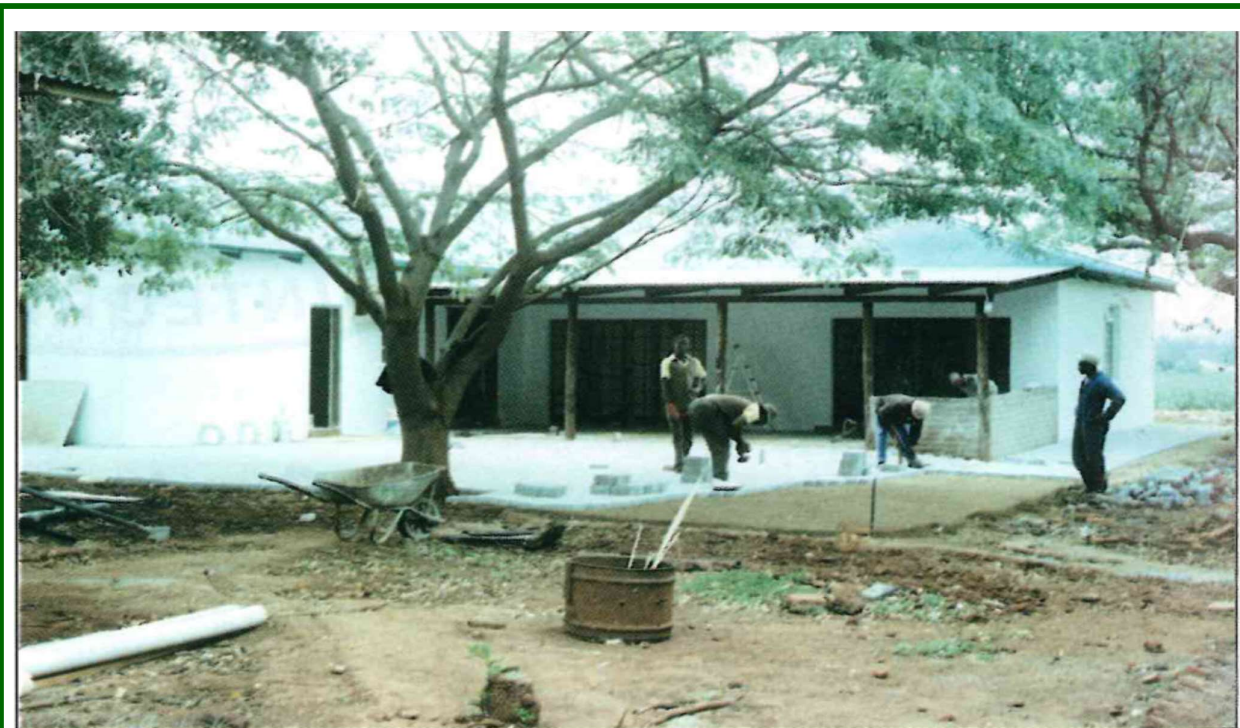
Sometimes, I still wonder how we got through it, but we did. In a nutshell, what we had to achieve on a very tight budget and within an even tighter time frame, included the following:

- To renovate the farmhouse to contain two Pre-school classrooms and toilets, a library/media centre, kitchen, reception area, principal's office and storeroom.
- To convert a garage into a grade 1 classroom.
- To convert three large outbuildings from storerooms and vehicle sheds into three classrooms, a technology workroom and boys and girls ablution facilities.
- To fence and secure all the school buildings.
- To upgrade the electricity supply and install air conditioning.
- To pave all high-traffic areas.

- To build playgrounds for the Pre-school and Preparatory school.



(Before) The original storeroom and vehicle shed being renovated into classrooms



(After) The classrooms taking shape

Many people contributed towards this mammoth project, but I would like to single out Neville Dodson and Colin Rhodes for the enormous amount of time and effort they put into the establishment of our new school.

Today, as a former parent, I take pride in Riverview Preparatory School and all the facilities that were created in a relatively short period of time.

André Schoeman



The first staff members of Riverview Preparatory School. Back: Petunia Lubisi (Pre-school assistant), Michelle Lambert (Pre-school teacher), Kate Muller (secretary), Yvonne du Buisson (remedial teacher), Coco van Aardt (Grade 4, 5 & 6 teacher). Front row: Debbie Fisher (Pre-school teacher), Gill Brokensha (principal and Grade 1 teacher), Anne-Marie Kalwa (Grade 2 & 3 teacher).