

# How to help learners get a head start on 2021

By [Edwell Gumbo](#)

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The impact of Covid-19 on South Africa's schools is likely to be felt well into the start of the 2021 academic year.



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The disruptions the pandemic has wrought, with learners missing a few to several months of traditional education, have meant that many haven't completed this year's curriculum in full. As a result, learning levels – between schools and even between learners – are perhaps more unequal than they have ever been before.

But while this might be cause for concern among teachers, parents and learners who are bracing themselves for another year, there is still reason for hope. With the correct resources, through concerted responses and by incorporating lessons learnt at the height of the pandemic, schools will be able to make up for lost time and level the playing field among their learners.

## Making up for lost time

At the start of 2021, it's likely that most schools will have a combination of learners who were able to continue with their studies in 2020, and those who were not able to study effectively. Teachers will notice this discrepancy acutely, particularly Grade 8 teachers who will be navigating classes of learners who come from different feeder schools.

The fact that government schools are starting towards the end of January, to allow teachers enough time to mark the 2020

matric papers, further complicates the issue. To compensate for lost time, it's likely that academic days will be longer and more intensive, extracurricular activities may be cut, and school holidays will be shorter.

The start of the 2021 school year might be a tricky time for teachers, parents and learners alike. However, all is not lost, and although we will be living in the shadow of this year's events, we are also so much better equipped now than we were when the pandemic first hit.

## **Relying on online learning**

In order to gain a firmer understanding of the academic level of each learner, teachers should consider conducting benchmark assessments and diagnostic tests early in the new year. This would help them to understand where each learner is at, and to adjust their lesson plans accordingly.

Once aware of the capabilities of each learner, teachers will need to turn once again to the tool that has proved to be so critical during Covid: online learning.

By supplementing traditional learning approaches with online learning, teachers will be able to split their classes up into different groups. Those who have a lot of work to make up will likely receive most of the teacher's attention, those who are in an intermediate position could supplement their work with digital content and pre-recorded lessons, and those who are already excelling could move ahead with online assessments.

## **Levelling the playing field**

Looking ahead, it's likely that a blended approach to education is the answer. Covid, fortunately, has taught us that we no longer need brick-and-mortar for learning to happen; we simply need connectivity. With Optim's solutions available offline, even children from disadvantaged backgrounds will be able to stay on top of their work.

Using these valuable tools will ensure a levelling of the academic playing field, not only in the aftermath of Covid, but for many years to come. Online learning provides better access of quality education to more learners, and will help to ensure that schools can continue to teach no matter the circumstances.

The 2021 school year is going to have its challenges, it's true, and getting learners where they need to be is going to take dedicated and concerted effort. But running diagnostic testing and incorporating a blended approach to learning will likely alleviate the pressure on teachers, parents and learners, and better equip South Africa's future leaders with the knowledge they need to succeed.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Edwell Gumbo is the Managing Director of Optim Classroom. Optim provides accessible home education and after-school solutions for parents, tutors and learners.

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