



■ Volunteer Gina Verberne

■ **Right:** Volunteers for the Books and Beyond programme at Sophakama Primary School spend two mornings a week assisting the pupils with their reading and writing.



Bridging the literacy gap at Sophakama

ATHINA MAY

Help is at hand for Sophakama Primary School pupils who, like thousands of others around the country, face the challenging prospect of learning in a language which is not their mother tongue.

Rogz, a pet gear company, is working with Partners for Possibility, an initiative that builds partnerships between schools and the private sector, to help Sophakama Primary.

One initiative is a pilot literacy programme, Books and Beyond, which was started at the school in

June 2014 to help pupils bridge the gap between Xhosa and English.

The project has since grown and been implemented at the school twice a week by 15 volunteers who help pupils with reading and writing exercises.

Their efforts paid off when 30 pupils graduated from the programme on Tuesday June 14.

"When I started here with the programme, one of the pupils couldn't read the word 'Stop', now he is reading well.

"We're just giving pupils a little extra help so they can start to blossom, and we create a safe space for them to read. I am so proud of

them," said volunteer Callie Louis.

She said volunteers use the Shine literacy programme, which is designed to improve the English of children in an English speaking school, but the task of bridging the language gap is even greater at Sophakama, which is a Xhosa-speaking school.

"The pupils are taught in Xhosa until Grade 4, then they are taught in English, so we're helping them to become more proficient in English before they reach Grade 4. Thus far it has greatly impacted the children," said Ms Louis.

The Grade 3 pupils who were chosen to take part in the project

diligently sat through their twice weekly lessons for the year and their ability to read in both English and Xhosa has improved so much that they now help other pupils during English lessons in class.

Sophakama principal Sabelo Madonci said his teachers had given very positive feedback on the programme.

"The programme is very good as a permanent structure in the school because it helps the pupils and teachers.

"The teachers are supposed to teach in English, but they're Xhosa speakers themselves, so they're not always confident to speak in Eng-

lish.

"Pupils now help the teachers and support others in group work," said Mr Madonci.

The school will now monitor pupils who attended the programme and track their progress to see if their results improve.

At the moment, the Books and Beyond programme can only accommodate 30 pupils due to the number of volunteers available.

If anyone would like to know more about the programme or volunteer their time, contact Callie Louis at 082 902 8775 or Amy Killingbeck at 072 454 9359 for more information.