



MEDIA RELEASE

29 October 2026

Thungela honours school leaders and most-improved schools in Mpumalanga

Thungela honoured 211 school principals, deputy principals and heads of departments and the most-improved schools, from 45 schools across the Nkangala and Gert Sibande districts at its Courageous Leadership Awards, held at the Simunye Hall at Greenside Colliery in eMalahleni on 29 October 2026. The awards ceremony marks their successful completion of the Penreach Courageous Leadership Development Programme, a two-year initiative designed to strengthen school leadership capabilities. Through the programme, school leaders were equipped with the skills and tools to lead more effectively, support and develop educators, and deliver improvements in learner outcomes.

Mpumi Sithole, executive head of corporate affairs at Thungela, said: "Investing in school leadership is one of the most effective ways to improve education outcomes. Behind every successful school is a leadership team whose decisions shape the experiences of both educators and learners. Through the Thungela Education Initiative, we aim to equip school leaders with the skills, knowledge and tools needed to strengthen leadership effectiveness and improve educational outcomes. These awards recognise their commitment to personal growth and continuous learning, while celebrating the positive difference they are making in the lives of the learners from communities where we operate."

The programme, delivered by implementation partner Penreach between 2025 and 2026, followed a comprehensive assessment of school management practices conducted in 2024 to identify key development areas. Insights from the assessment informed a tailored leadership development journey, combining targeted training and coaching to strengthen the capabilities of participating school leaders and support improved school performance.

The training covered key areas of school leadership, including curriculum management, school planning, people management, financial management, governance, and resource mobilisation and management. Heads of department received focused support on curriculum coverage, teacher development, and the effective use of assessment data to improve teaching and learner outcomes. It also emphasised practical application.

Penreach supported participants in compiling portfolios of evidence to demonstrate how they were applying their learning in their schools. These portfolios were independently assessed as part of the development process.

Lawrence Tafiriye, Penreach Courageous Leadership Development programme director, said the emphasis on practical application was central to the programme. "Leading a school comes with responsibilities that extend far beyond the classroom. Our approach was to equip school leaders with practical skills that could be applied directly to the challenges they face in their schools. The portfolios of evidence provided participants with an opportunity to demonstrate not only what they had learned, but how they were translating that learning into meaningful action. These awards recognise the commitment required to pursue professional growth while continuing to lead, support and inspire school communities."

Nkululeko Nzekeni, principal of Vukuzithathe Primary, said: "This programme has strengthened my confidence as a leader and provided practical tools that I can apply in my school every day. The opportunity to learn alongside other school leaders, share experiences and implement new approaches has been invaluable. I believe the programme has helped us create a stronger foundation for improving teaching and learning, ultimately benefiting our learners."

Lucy Moyane, head of department at the Mpumalanga Department of Education, said effective leadership is fundamental to creating schools where educators can thrive and learners can succeed. “Strong school leadership sets the tone for a culture of accountability, excellence and continuous improvement. When school leaders are equipped with the right skills and support, they are better positioned to create environments that enable quality teaching and learning. Programmes such as this one, play an important role in strengthening leadership capacity and contributing to improved performance.”

The Thungela Education Initiative, in partnership with the Mpumalanga Department of Education and our implementation partners, are investing in the people and school environments that will help improve educational outcomes over time. “This is what courageous leadership is about; confronting challenges embracing change and continually finding better ways to serve others. That is the commitment we are recognising through the Thungela Education Initiative and these awards,” said Sithole.

ENDS

For further information, please contact:

Hulisani Rasivhaga
hulisani.rasivhaga@thungela.com
083 370 2327

Editor's note:

Thungela, which means ‘to ignite’ in isiZulu, is one of the largest producers and exporters of thermal coal, with operations in South Africa and Australia. Our quality coal reserves and marketable production position us as a key player in the global energy market as we deliver coal through world-class ports, powering nations.

The Group owns interests in and produces its thermal coal from five mining operations located in Mpumalanga, South Africa, which consist of both underground and opencast mines, including Greenside, Khwezela, Zibulo, Mafube and Annea, and the Ensham Mine in Queensland, Australia. Thungela Marketing International in Dubai underscores the Company's commitment to capture the full margin on our products and engage with the international commodities market as a global coal producer.

In other parts of the value chain, Thungela holds a 50% interest in Phola Coal Processing Plant, and a 23.56% direct interest in Richard's Bay Coal Terminal. The terminal is one of the world's leading coal export terminals, with an advanced 24-hour operation and a design capacity of 91Mtpa.

Thungela is committed to operating in a responsible way to ignite value for a shared future. We want to ensure that our mining activities positively impact our employees, shareholders and the communities where we operate.