

# R48m project opens digital doorway

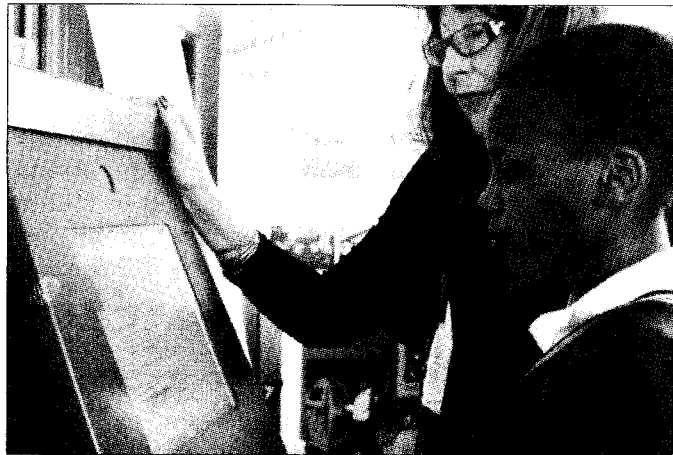
**LERATO MATSANENG**

A PLAN to bridge the digital divide in rural areas is likely to benefit thousands of schools and change the surrounding communities.

The science and technology ministry is sponsoring the Digital Doorways programme – rugged computer terminals set up at schools and open to the public, allowing rural people to access information which forms part of daily life for computer-literate people.

The R48 million initiative by the Science and Technology Department and the Meraka Institute of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) aims to install Digital Doorways in 30 000 schools across the country.

This week, at the launch of the second phase in Ntshongweni, west of Durban, Science and Technology Minister Mosibudi Mangena encouraged the community to take an interest in the computers.



**ALBINI Girls High pupil Zama Gumedede shows KwaZulu-Natal Education MEC Ina Cronje how to use a Digital Doorway terminal**

“Parents must use these computers during the day while children are at school. The only way digital barriers can be removed is if everyone gets involved.”

The minister said the programme was for people to teach themselves computer

skills. The first phase was piloted in a rural Eastern Cape village, in December 2002.

Each terminal has a waterproof and scratchproof metal cover, with three screens mounted on a single stand and a built-in keyboard and laser mouse.

It connects to the web by satellite, allowing access to select content, including the open source encyclopaedia Wikipedia, educational games and a newspaper especially written for children.

The minister said the terminals would make it possible for poor, rural communities to communicate with each other. It also allows access to state websites and services.

Digital Doorway terminals have been installed at four schools and the community resource centre at Ntshongweni.

“One or two children will be on the keyboard while about 10 others give instructions – but the whole group learns,” said Meraka engineering technologist, Grant Cambridge.

Albini Girls High Grade 9 pupil Zama Gumedede said the computers had allowed them to become more active in their learning. “Whenever we have a project to do, we use these to get information.”

