

Keynote delivered by the MEC for Education, Mrs. Reginah Mhaule at the occasion of the Meeting with Primary School Principals at Ingwenyama Lodge on 11 March 2014.

Programme Director and Head of Department; Mrs. Mahlasedi Mhlabane

District Directors

Members of Senior Management

Principals

Officials from the Department

Sanibonani

Let me take this time to extend our profound appreciation to you for gracing this meeting.

We are meeting at the time when the entire province is experiencing heavy rains which to some extent have a bearing on the teaching and learning process.

It will be prudent that children and as well as their families are properly advised not to take unnecessary risks at this time.

These rains came at a cost because as soon as they subside we will be receiving delegations demanding repairs the following day.

I request that you send us daily situational reports especially in areas where teaching and learning is affected.

It was my wish that we could have met in January so that we could together be informed of what is supposed to constitute your school improvement programmes. Notwithstanding that this may be a blessing in disguise because now that we are meeting two weeks before schools closes for the Easter Holidays, we are provided an opportunity to be informed and to understand what constituted developments of the first quarter. What worked, what are the challenges and what plans are there to address such challenges.

I would appreciate that I get an assurance from the horses' mouth so that I may be confident when I report to my principals as well.

Our collective view is that for every structure to be concrete and not be moved by unfriendly winds and rain, it must be built on a strong foundation and not sinking sand.

This theory is indeed one that we are to adhere to, as we assist our learners to progress steadily to other learning phases in school.

ANA Examinations

Last year, we saw a total number of 586 339 (**Five Hundred and Eighty Six Thousand Three Hundred and Thirty Nine**) Grades 1 to 6 and 9 learners in the province who sat for their ANA examinations according to a nationally-set timetable; this standardized exercise is one that allows us to verify that every learner is developing the language and Mathematical skills appropriate for the grade.

It is through this endeavor that we also ensure that corrective measures are implemented in order to improve the standard of numeracy and literacy at primary level.

As we are all aware, marking of all ANA tests are done by teachers, guided by the memoranda provided by the Department of Basic Education.

In addition, the Department of Basic Education and Provinces conduct centralised moderation of samples of marked scripts from schools to verify the quality of marking at school level.

It is of great concern to the Department that our learners are struggling in the ANA tests but perform better at the internally set and marked tests administered by schools.

This sends one message to us and that is the locally administered tests seem to be of lower quality and standard as the performance does not correlate with the ANA test performance.

In Grade 1 Mathematics we have noted a decline in performance as a Province from 65.9% in 2012 to 56.2% in 2013, in Grade 1 Language we improved from 54.1% in 2012 to 57.1% in 2013.

In Grade 3 Mathematics, we also noted an improvement from 35.6% to 47.8% putting Mpumalanga second last in performance.

My intention is not to emit statistics as I am quite aware of the fact that this report was circulated to schools and is freely available on the DBE website for your perusal.

New Developments on the Administration of ANA

I hope you have been fairly apprised that there are new developments to be introduced this year in the administration of ANA. For the first time, ANA will be written in grade 7 and 8.

Secondly, the Department will rely on SA.SAMS (South School Administration Management System) learner data captured by schools.

This means that schools are obliged to update their information on SA.SAMS regularly and authentically. Principals must make sure that all the necessary data captured on SA.SAMS is accurate, reliable and authentic.

All Circuit Managers have been briefed about this new development and we hope that you have been informed already.

For this year, ANA will be written from 16 to 19 September and the timetable has already been forwarded to schools.

It is also expected that after the writing of ANA schools should be in a position to analyse their results, communicate these to parents and develop school improvement plans.

I urge principals to appreciate that ANA is intended to diagnose the state of health of our system and to remedy where there are grey areas and as such it must not be dealt with as a compliance matter.

At the occasion of the delivery of the 2011 Policy and Budget Speech on the 28th of May, I pronounced that the Department is targeting to attain **60%** of learners performing at acceptable levels in Grades **3, 6 and 9** in Literacy and Numeracy by 2014.

By the looks of things we are not near that target and at some instances it seem we are regressing as we are at 47% for Grade 3 Languages and 33.6% for Grade 6 Mathematics.

This is a worrying trend and I thus implore you to look into a remedy of this situation so that we can move forward together as a Province to the advantage of our learners.

Psychosocial Support Workshop

On 25 February 2014 the Department in collaboration with some of its stakeholders convened a Psychosocial Support Workshop to discuss means of strengthening of the District Based Support Teams (DBSTs).

The main aim of that discussion was to sensitize the partners to optimally support the child at risk. This includes the identification of the child at risk, identification of the role-players to be involved and to develop strategies in dealing with children at risk and crime prevention of most importance was for the sector to be able to co-ordinate referrals and support programmes accordingly, curb Substance Abuse and Bullying at schools and to develop crime prevention and children at risk programmes

I therefore request that principals come closer to this matter and ensure that schools remain child friendly and caring centres in all instances.

Implementation of Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) Vaccination

The Department of Health in collaboration with the Department of Education has prioritized the roll-out of HPV Vaccination to prevent Cervical Cancer which is the second most dangerous type of cancer world-wide.

The program will be targeting Grade 4 girl learners aged 9 years and older.

The targeted group has been informed by research which has shown that girls of 9 years are not yet sexually active and that's when the vaccine is more effective.

The HPV Vaccine will be provided at schools. The vaccination teams will visit schools twice a year (6 months apart).

All Public Schools, quintile 1-5, non-quintile and Special Schools will be involved.

The Management Plan of the introduction of HPV vaccination is in place. All vaccination teams in the Department of Health have been orientated.

Social mobilization continues through Health Promotion teams and school nurses.

Orientation sessions for the Department of Education have started already and are ongoing to ensure smooth co-ordination at school level.

Consultative meetings for parents through the Associations of School Governing Bodies has been done and it is our hope that this is cascaded to all parents through the SGBs.

The vaccine and equipment collection sites are already identified. All vaccination teams will be led by a professional nurse.

Schools will co-ordinate internal matters of consent and identification of relevant learners.

Co-ordination for school visits will occur two weeks before the actual HPV vaccination session takes place.

HPV vaccination monitoring and evaluation will also take place and tools in this regard have already been developed.

The Provincial Departments of Health and Education have already started to disseminate information across the province directly to schools and through media channels.

I therefore request all principals to co-operate with this process and ensure its success.

Support to Learners with Special Education Needs

We are thus mandated to take care of the needs of our schools and learners so as to enhance teaching and learning to meet the requirements of the present era.

As a Department we intend to banish inequality to the books of history especially with regards to learners with special educational needs. We want to be as inclusive as possible when it comes to infrastructural requirements even on matters of movable property.

Our goal is to ensure that learners with special educational needs are not left behind and that they should be integrated into the mainstream where possible.

We are quite aware of the restrictions and limitations that our schools are faced with in this regard, hence we have schools that are specialising and focusing on dispensing special needs education.

I thus want all our principals to be aware of this situation so that you may be able to take good care of our learners with special needs and be able to refer them to the right institutions to get an education appropriate to their needs.

Tomorrow, I will visit KaMagugu Special School to support and to take stock of the teaching and learning process and on 18 March 2014 we will be handing over a state of the art special school at Emalahleni Local Municipality called Thanduxolo Specialised School. This is part of our commitment to ensure that the constitutional mandate to education for all children is at no stage compromised.

Enabling Factors

Mpumalanga Province has an acceptable teacher-pupil ratio of **1:29**, classroom pupil ratio stands at **1:40**, **98%** of principals' posts are filled and processes are ongoing to ensure that all schools' principal posts are filled.

The qualifications, age and state of health of our teachers is favorably good and almost all learners attend school every day.

65 414 learners are transported daily and **859 416** learners in **1 633** public schools receive School Nutrition daily.

The Department has every month honored its obligations with regards to the remuneration for Principals, Senior Management Teams and Educators.

Training is rendered by the Department on Management and Leadership in policy implementation, Maths, Science and Technology Programmes and so on.

There are endeavours to improve the provision of school infrastructure and comparatively speaking our Province is doing very well.

All these and other programmes should ordinarily translate to better results or outstanding performance.

It is therefore imperative that we must begin to ask ourselves serious questions on why are developments in this way?

Conclusion

Ladies and Gentlemen, the importance of primary schooling cannot be over-emphasised as it is all clear to all of us that a shaky foundation at that level would be detrimental to the whole education system.

I just want to bring to your attention the appreciation that we have for the marvelous work that you do as you initiate our children to teaching and learning and at the same time weaning them of illiteracy.

As primary school principals we need to take cognisance of the value that we play in the education value chain, hence our attention should be on the Annual National Assessment and the performance of the Province in that regard.

We have pronounced publicly that we will not rest until learner performance in the Province reaches acceptable levels.

We will continue to call consultative meetings, summits, conferences and izindaba until we attain our objectives of ensuring that all learners who enter our system make the grade.

Ngiyabonga.