

Remarks at the media briefing hosted by Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga on the occasion of the last post-Council Of Education Ministers' meeting held in Pretoria, 8 March 2019

Good morning and welcome to what is our last post CEM media briefing of the current political term. We have grown accustomed to hosting these briefings to update the media on the developments in the basic education sector. As you know general elections are around the corner and for us it means we need to pause and reflect on the work done since we assumed office in 2014.

The past five years has seen its fair share of triumph and tribulation in the education sector. CEM took the opportunity of its final sitting for strategic reflection on the sectors performance for the period 2014 to 2019, but also to be forward looking as we prepare to hand over to our successors and look at the next steps needed to take the education system forward and further improve education outcomes.

We looked at progress made in key decisions taken by CEM over the past 5 years as well as progress on Decisions of the Basic Education Sector Makgotla and round table discussions.

As custodians of the education sector we are best placed to look at the sector from within and critically analyse what needs to be done.

We were able to have frank discussions about one the work we have done and were able to make critical decisions.

We need to ensure that our decisions translate into action towards Governments Outcome 1 : Improved Quality Basic Education. As the end of the day this is the reason we are all here is to ensure that the South African child has access to Quality Basic Education.

The DBE's "Action Plan to 2019" has 27 goals – 13 which state the educational outcomes we aim to achieve and 14 which relate to activities that must be done in order to achieve those outcomes. The Director-General took us through an analysis of 6 thematic areas that we as CEM were able to critically engage on.

1. Improved quality teaching and learning through development, supply and effective utilisation of teachers;
2. Improved quality teaching and learning, through provision of adequate, quality infrastructure and LTSM;
3. Improving assessment for learning to ensure quality and efficiency in academic achievement;
4. Expanded access to ECD and improvement of the quality of Grade R, with support for pre-Grade R provision;
5. Strengthening accountability and improving management at school, community and district level; and

6. Partnerships for educational reform and improved quality.

QUALITY BASIC EDUCATION

All scientific indicators reflect progress and show that we are turning the tide in terms of ensuring every South African child has access to Quality Basic Education.

The best available data sources designed explicitly for measuring trends in learning at a national level come from three international assessments in which South Africa has participated – TIMSS (in 1995, 1999, 2002, 2011 and 2015), PIRLS (in 2006, 2011 & 2016) and SEACMEQ (in 2000, 2007 & 2013). These surveys have been instrumental in raising awareness throughout the sector that the levels of learning in primary school maths, reading and literacy as well as mathematics and science in junior secondary school are worryingly low in South Africa. However they have assisted us greatly in being able to identify where the challenges lie and where to put interventions in place.

The good news is that in recent rounds of TIMSS, PIRLS and SEACMEQ we have observed that the country's levels of learning have been improving across the board. In the TIMSS assessment (grade 9 mathematics and science), South Africa has been the fastest improving country between the surveys of 2002, 2011 and 2015. In SEACMEQ, a large improvement at the grade 6 level was noted between 2007 and 2013 in both mathematics and reading.

The NSC results have also shown consistent improvements in recent years, both in terms of pass rates and the numbers passing every year. One important reflection of quality in the system is the numbers of NSC candidates achieving a "Bachelors-level" pass each year as this is required for access to a degree programme at university. The number of Bachelor passes has roughly doubled since 2007. Encouragingly, increases in the number of Black African bachelor passes almost entirely accounts for the overall improvement.

In a country like South Africa, where the quality of education provision is in the public eye and gets a lot of critique. One of the concerns we have heard from the public is around the multiple examination opportunity.

We looked critically at some of the more seemingly controversial decisions we have taken as a collective, such as the policy on progression, as well as the Multiple Examination Opportunity (MEO) that was introduced by us.

We all agreed that the policy on progression is something that we can be proud of. It can be viewed as a huge success with over 100 000 progressed learners having passed and attained a matric certificate. These are learners that may otherwise have ended up dropping out of the system, but now they will have a chance at a brighter future.

Grade repetition is a huge inefficiency in our education system. This phenomenon also contributes to our critics argument that the number of learners that enter Grade 1 does not correlate with those who exit the system at Grade 12, many of these are still in lower grades having repeated somewhere along the line.

The progressed learner policy also has an impact on the efficiency of learner progression through the schooling system. Under this policy learners are only permitted to repeat at most one grade per phase. The result of this policy is that, since the 2015 NSC examinations, there have been large numbers of NSC candidates sitting for the examinations despite not having fulfilled the formal requirements for passing Grade 11. Historically, we observe high repetition rates and high dropout rates in grades 10, 11 and 12. Therefore, it is important to understand that many of the so-called “progressed learners” would probably have dropped out of school without sitting for the NSC examination after repeating several times – a highly inefficient outcome. Although the matric pass rate for progressed learners has been lower than that for non-progressed learners, many progressed learners did pass matric. It seems likely, therefore, that the overall effect of this new policy will be to increase the numbers of matriculants annually, by discouraging overly restrictive grade repetition leading to dropout.

We had to acknowledge however, as CEM, that while well intentioned, the Multiple Examination Opportunity is being used by some schools as a gate keeping mechanism and not for its original intentions. Instead of assisting vulnerable learners to attain a matric certificate, it was allowing schools to cull learners through this process and not adequately supporting them through the multiple examination opportunities. For this reason CEM took the bold decision to protect learners and do away with the MEO from 2020.

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

It is evident from many local and international assessments that if we hope to make serious inroads into improving the sector drastically we need to start with Early Childhood Development

CEM welcomed the President’s announcement in the recent State of the Nation Address (SONA) that Early Childhood Development (ECD) will migrate from the Department of Social Development (DSD) to be fully immersed in the Department of Basic Education (DBE). They however did raise critical concerns, the main being that the requisite budgets need to follow this new mandate. It is agreed that if we hope to further transform the sector, we need to ensure that young children are being significantly educationally stimulated from a very early age.

The most dramatic improvement in access to education of this term has been in the area of pre-school attendance, driven mainly by the expansion of the Grade R programme since the White Paper of 2001. The numbers of children enrolled in Grade R in schools has increased from 241 525 in 2001 to 839 515 in 2017. When one looks at the daily activities of 5 and 6 year-old children in South Africa, this has clearly had a massive impact. The National Development Plan (NDP): Vision 2030 sets quality ECD as a priority for the country to improve the quality of education and the long-term prospects of future generations and society as a whole. It further indicates that national capabilities need to be built that requires quality ECD, schooling, college, university and adult education and training

programmes. About 40% of 5 year-olds were attending an educational institution in 2002, but by 2017 this figure is approaching 90%. Amongst 6 year-olds there is now almost universal attendance of an educational institution, and approximately 95% of children entering Grade 1 have previously attended Grade R (according to 2017 General Household Survey data).

As we reflect on the achievements of this administration and look back, taking into consideration Governments 25 year review process, Early Childhood Development has been a critical focus area as we have seen the implementation of universal Grade R across the sector. The next step now is to legislate Grade R as part of the compulsory schooling cohort to ensure that no child is left behind and all children have access to quality teaching and learning from a young age.

LTSM

CEM reflected also on the journey taken in ensuring we deliver LTSM.

However while the previous administration was confronted by serious challenges with the delivery of LTSM, the provision of this has been a success of the current administration. We have learnt from mistakes of the past and developed effective and efficient models based on the challenges and short comings of the past. We've streamlined processes, we've provided around 50 million work books to learners per year.

We have developed a minimum set of textbooks and workbooks, required according to national policy, and increased access to computers and other forms of media.

FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

The fourth industrial revolution is well and truly upon us. As we reflect on teaching and learning and where some of our challenges have been, a way forward is to not only ensure we expose our learners to the fourth industrial revolution but also to use technology to enhance teaching and learning in the classroom.

The past two decades have seen the emergence of a great global movement. This movement warrants a new model of teaching and learning for the 21st century.

The fourth Industrial Revolution is said to be driven by the following innovative technologies:

High Speed Internet;

Robotics and Coding;

Automation;

Virtual Reality;

Mobile Supercomputing;

Cloud Technology;

Big Data and Data Analytics;

Artificial Intelligence; and

Internet of Things and other Technologies such as Self Driving Cars, Neuro-Technological Brain Enhancements and Genetic Editing.

These technologies are predicated to have a significant effect on our daily lives, especially if we are to prepare the younger generation and re-educate and re-skill the current generation for the changing world. The fourth industrial revolution will also have an impact on the current job market and we need to ensure we are adequately preparing young people for the skills and job market of the future.

Based on a comprehensive review of literature, governments across the world have decided to pay special focus on Critical Areas.

CODING AND ROBOTICS CURRICULA

To create a sustainable industrialisation and to keep pace with the world, South Africa is developing a coding as well as robotics curricula to be included in GET from Grade R-9. The curricula will provide learners with an understanding of coding and robotics and will develop their skills and competencies to prepare them for the 4th Industrial Revolution. The curricula will ensure that our schooling system produces learners with the foundations for future work, and equip them with skills for the changing world.

The Coding curriculum will develop learners' ability to solve problems, think critically, and work collaboratively and creatively; function in a digital and information-driven world; apply digital and ICT skills; and to transfer these skills to solve everyday problems. Learners will also become a new generation of creative, innovative thinkers that can use coding to express their ideas; and adopt a culture of being self-directed, life-long learners.

We are grateful to the University of South Africa (UNISA) that has generously agreed to partner with the DBE by making available their 24 ICT Laboratories throughout the country for the training of 72 000 teachers in Coding. The DBE is also working with civil society, academic institutions and businesses, such as Africa Teen Geeks. With the support of Africa Teen Geeks, UNISA, North West University, ORT South Africa and Globenet, the DBE developed a Framework for Coding Grade R-9.

Google, Teen Geeks and other Big Businesses through Africa, are supporting the DBE to develop a coding platform that utilises Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning to customise teaching and learning. Customised teaching is the direct opposite of the one-size-fits-all methodology or philosophy. It considers individual student aptitude, learning speed, background, response and other variables. It processes the data in real time and provides feedback to the teacher, so that the teacher can recognise flagging student attention or poor response immediately, and take corrective actions. This will improve student participation and, in the process, the overall results.

Machine learning will be able to explain the concepts as well as set the goals for individual students. On the other hand, teachers will be able to track whether or not the students are able to digest the concepts. Based on that feedback, educators can change or modify the methodology, curriculum or topics accordingly. And, the result is more accurate and targeted for individuals. In simple terms, machine learning does the analytics based on individual student data, and makes the decision-making process automatic and uniform. This Coding platform will need to be available in all 11 languages, ensuring that rural and township children will be introduced to coding and robotics in their own mother tongue, in line with this government's mission to provide an inclusive education accessible to all.

The DBE will also be introducing a Robotics curriculum from Grade R-9. This robotics curriculum will have a strong foundation in Engineering in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), and it will enable learners to build and operate robots through programming code. This robotics curriculum will not require any infrastructure or devices, but will need maker spaces to provide hands-on, creative ways to encourage students to design, experiment, build and invent; e.g., through cardboard construction activities. The projects will become more challenging as the grades progress. In Grade 9, the learners will be taught how to build a computer from scratch. This will not only develop STEM skills, but also contribute to effectively developing children's creativity, critical thinking, design thinking, and digital skills. This will ensure that South Africa develops learners who are makers and inventors who will contribute to building an innovative culture in South Africa.

Teachers are going to be key in teaching this new subject; and the plan is to train at least three teachers in each of the 16 000 primary schools to teach Coding. The implementation of Coding in the system will be start with a pilot in 1000 schools in 2020 in five provinces for Grade 7 to 9.

ICT DEVICES AND DIGITISATION OF LEARNING MATERIAL

The DBE plans to provide each learner and teacher with an ICT device with access to digitised Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSMs). The plan will be implemented in three phases commencing with Phase 1 that will target multi-grade, multiphase, farm and selected rural schools (2020 - 2021). The Second Phase will target quintile 1 to 3 schools (2022 - 2023), and Phase 3 will target quintile 4 and 5 schools (2024 - 2025). All special needs schools will be accommodated in all phases according to the type of disability.

The aims and objectives of this intervention are entrenched in the e-education goals of White Paper 7, Action Plan to 2019: Towards the Realisation of Schooling in 2030, and the National Development Plan (NDP). These aim to:

Enhance the teaching and learning experience of learners and teachers through ICT integration;

Ensure that learners have the ability to use digital technology and acquire 21st century skills;

Provide learners and teachers with digital content pre-loaded on appropriate ICT devices;

Promote the local industry in the economic growth by developing education specific devices;

Ensure that teachers have the relevant training to integrate ICT into teaching and learning; and

Support learning and teaching in Special Needs Schools.

A comprehensive ICT plan has been developed to provide a framework for an affordable and sustainable implementation of ICTs in education. The three-phased ICT school deployment model will ensure ICT compliance in all schools by 2025.

2019 will be used to prepare, and starting in 2020 (phase 1 of the project) the focus for this period will be on implementation in multigrade, multiphase, farm, selected rural as well as selected special needs schools, targeting the Foundation Phase. This Phase will be characterised by the finalisation of rollout plans, as well as massive teacher skilling, particularly the rollout of the infrastructure, including basic education-limited devices, as well as the development and distribution of digital content for the schools mentioned above.

ICT can be used as a teaching aid, especially in these schools and where teachers are faced with multigrade teaching.

The DBE will work with other government departments, the private sector and social partners in the deployment of ICTs, and will drive a sector-wide campaign to maximise the benefit of e-Learning at all schools in the country.

Four areas of focus have been identified from the e-Education White Paper (2004). The proposed focus areas are digital content resource development (digitisation), ICT professional development for management, teaching and learning; ICT infrastructure and schools connectivity.

The Departments of Basic Education and Communications have developed a connectivity plan for schools. The plan seeks to provide cost-effective, secure and efficient connectivity that will advance the quality of teaching and learning in schools, specifically ensuring access to quality education. The creation of the Virtual Private Network (VPN) would establish a platform that could accommodate digital content, mobile content, administrative application (SA-SAMS), professional development resources, learning objectives and related department circulars. The VPN could be accessed via desktop computers, teachers' laptops and mobile devices.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure could be described as the bugbear of this administration. As an Education Department, the provision of Infrastructure has not been where our strength lies and we have had to work hard to build capacity and try to find solutions to the severe, historical

infrastructure backlogs we have faced. While our infrastructure challenges remain huge, it is important to take note of where we come from and how the picture has changed drastically over the years.

In 1996 the country had 26,734 ordinary schools with an average learner classroom ratio of 43:1. Out of these, only 11 000 were reportedly in good or excellent condition.

Approximately 55% of learners (6.6 million) were in schools without toilet facilities and the learner toilet ratio was 41:1, while 35% of learners did not have access to water at school. Nationally, only 42% of schools had access to electricity; 40% had access to telephones and only 9% (2330 schools) had access to computers for learning and teaching.

Today thanks to a concerted and consistent effort we are looking at a very different situation, while still not yet attaining the ideal.

In response, the sector provided infrastructure through several initiatives. Two recent programmes are the Provincial Schools Building Programme and the Accelerated School Infrastructure Delivery Initiative (ASIDI). The Provincial Schools Building Programme is implemented by Provincial Education Departments (PEDs) and is funded through the Education Infrastructure Grant (EIG) and provincial contribution through the standard National Treasury funding mechanisms. The ASIDI is driven by the DBE to address inappropriate structures and basic services; it is funded through the Schools Infrastructure Backlogs Grant. Some of the key ASIDI areas include construction; maintenance; upgrading and rehabilitation of new and existing infrastructure in education; providing infrastructure to match curriculum requirements; replacing inappropriate schools; provision of basic services; addressing damage to infrastructure caused by natural disasters; extending existing schools with additional classrooms/facilities; addressing the achievement of the targets set out in the minimum norms and standards for school infrastructure and enhancing capacity to deliver infrastructure in education.

The ASIDI has seen state of the art schools erected in place of mud and plankie schools giving the poorest of the poor access to world class education facilities for the first time.

I have also challenged those responsible for infrastructure across the sector to ensure that we build schools fit for purpose. To be creative and innovative in our approach to school infrastructure, taking into consideration the tight fiscal situation we are in as a country. For example to rethink the classroom for multi-grade teaching, taking into consideration the use of technology in our teaching and learning environments and a number of other factors to ensure we make the most of the resources we have to build useful, innovative teaching spaces.

As the Education Department it may be time to look at an external agency like that of SANRAL that will be solely responsible for education infrastructure, including on going planned maintenance, so that we can focus on the core business of teaching and learning. This could be something the next administration will need to look at. An agency that will have the capacity to deal with all aspects related to school infrastructure, as all provinces

have agreed that the current models with public works as implementing agents is not efficient.

While most of our focus has been on addressing infrastructure backlogs; the horrific DrieHoek school tragedy has brought maintenance sharply into focus. Many learners, parents and teachers have been looking at existing infrastructure and questioning its structural integrity. There needs to be regular inspection and maintenance of school infrastructure to ensure that our learners are in safe and secure environments.

SANITATION APPROPRIATE FOR EDUCATION (SAFE)

Since the launch of the SAFE Initiative by the President in August 2018, 787 schools have been provided with safe, age- and grade-appropriate sanitation facilities, with a further 841 schools either in planning, design or construction stages.

It is important to remember that we did not start eradicating pit-latrines with the launch of the SAFE initiative. Since 2000, 10 621 schools have been provided with sanitation. Many of those that remain are those with particular requirements, for example no water born sewage systems and they require alternative sanitation technology. We are working with other departments to find the best sustainable solutions for these schools.

The verification process of the 3 898 schools with pit latrines will be undertaken first to determine the exact needs of each school and which schools should be prioritised. The DBE Programme Support Unit (PSU) will grade the severity of the infrastructure needs into the following 3 broad categories to facilitate prioritisation:

Red - a dire need for facilities, immediate intervention required;

Amber - partly functioning facilities, second wave of intervention; and

Green - reasonable functionality, only maintenance required.

The SAFE initiative will be delivered through an integrated delivery model, led by the DBE and working with and through the Provincial Education Departments and partnering with sister departments, such as the National and Provincial Treasuries, the Department of Water and Sanitation, and the national and provincial Departments of Public Works.

The private sector has already pledged R256 million to date.

Additionally, National Treasury has allocated a total of R3.4 billion to the SAFE Initiative over the 2019 MTEF. We have identified clear timeframes and delivery models to ensure that while we are delivering sanitation infrastructure, this will also benefit local small businesses.

We are confident that within the next three years we would have eradicated the remaining 3898 pit-latrines in schools.

CURRICULUM

This administration has not only introduced a number of new subjects but we have introduced two entirely new curriculum pathways, that of the Technical Vocational

education stream and the Occupational Vocational stream. CEM sought to look at where we are in the various stages of implementation of these in the different provinces. We have seen some provinces build Aviation Schools while others have built Maritime Schools. Some for example are industry brand specific like the BMW focused school where we are working directly with industry players to ensure that we produce learners that are employable and what specific industries require. These schools give learners career opportunities straight out of school. CEM agreed that these schools of specialisation have been a huge success and more need to be rolled out.

We have also looked at the introduction of history and are in the process of drastically overhauling the history curriculum with the view to make it compulsory for all learners. The Task Team appointed will be responsible to:

develop a new History curriculum from Grade 4 to 12;

conduct provincial consultation in the education sector and obtain inputs into the new history curriculum;

receive inputs and comments for consideration on the new History curriculum;

screen textbooks to ensure alignments with the new curriculum; and

propose History Teacher development programmes for both Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and In-service Teacher Education.

We have been incrementally introducing African Languages into our schools that previously did not offer and indigenous African Language. Almost all public schools now have an African Indigenous school offering (insert numbers).

We have made major inroads in terms of learners with differentiated needs. A major step in the right direction has been the introduction of South African Sign language as a home language subject which was examined as part of the NSC for the first time last year.

POLICY

A number of ground breaking policies have been developed by this administration, these include the policy on the Prevention and Management of HIV and TB as well as the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy policy. The policy on Home Education as well as many others, some have had more backlash and public participation than others. None has been more significant than the development of the BELA Bill.

The Draft Basic Education Laws Amendment Bill, 2014 (the Draft Amendment Bill), proposes to amend the South African Schools Act, 1996 (Act No. 84 of 1996), and the Employment of Educators Act, 1998 (Act No. 76 of 1998) (the SASA and the EEA, respectively), so as to align them with developments in the education landscape and to ensure that systems of learning and excellence in education are put in place in a manner which respects, protects, promotes and fulfils the right to basic education enshrined in section 29(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996.

The South African Schools Act was developed in 1996 and spoke to the education needs and environment then. However since 1996 we have seen major changes to both the educational environment and the educational needs of the South African Education system and the BELA Bill seeks to address these in an inclusive and comprehensive way.

The Draft Amendment Bill seeks to amend the SASA and the EEA so as to make certain technical and substantive adjustments, to clarify certain existing provisions and to insert certain provisions to cover matters which are not provided for in the existing legislation.

The Bill has been through the public participation process and the next phase will for it to go before the Parliamentary Committee for Basic Education.

SCHOOL SAFETY

CEM reflected deeply on the diverse challenges related to school safety. School safety covers many aspects some within our control and others out. Measures have been put in place to ensure schools are adequately fenced and schools are well lit to discourage criminality.

We have also developed Guidelines for Identifying persons who are unsuitable to work with children. These guidelines are in the process of being developed to protect the right of children in the schooling system, against sexual offenders. The guidelines will assist in ensuring that learners are not physically and emotionally abused by persons in the school environment and to assist in ensuring that schools are free of abuse and exploitation.

We have ongoing programs to educate learners around the dangers of bullying, drug abuse and violence that have plagued our schools in recent years. This is an area that we have had to look at closely even holding a school safety summit to ensure we begin to address these, by working with police and communities to ensure schools are safe spaces. It was agreed that there needs to be increased focus on the so called “soft areas” of education related to care and support of children to assist them in dealing with some of the societal challenges they are confronted with.

CONCLUSION

CEM was about reflection of what we as a the collective leadership has managed to achieve and where we have not performed as we had hoped when we first came into office. While ourselves as the political leaders may go, Government will continue and we have a very good idea of where the education system needs to go.

Amongst others the following concerns were raised by MEC’s ongoing challenges around infrastructure, social cohesion, school safety, care and support for vulnerable children.

We reflected on 2030 and what it is that the system needs to put in place to ensure that the class of 2030 embodies the vision we have for our children and the goals set out in the NDP.

We have a massive body of research and clear plans for the next administration based on the work already started. We are confident we are leaving the sector in a better position

that we found and have prepared the soil for even more positive growth and improvement in the years to come.