

REMARKS BY MINISTER DEBBIE SCHÄFER

2019 Western Cape School Awards for Achievement in Language and Mathematics (Grades 3, 6 and 9) – 25 February 2020

Superintendent-General Brian Schreuder

DDGs, Mr Lewis and Dr Beets,

All other WCED officials,

School principals and governing bodies,

Teachers

Apologies from Lorraine Botha, standing committee chair

Good evening to you all.

It is that time of year again when we celebrate the achievements of our schools in the Grade 3, 6 and 9 systemic tests. Too often, all the attention is placed on matric results, and it is easy to forget that matric successes don't happen in one year. They are the result of many long years of effort by learners, staff and communities.

I don't want to do a standard "importance of systemics" speech this year. I think we all know that by now. So I will briefly address how we have performed and then discuss some other more general issues about the opportunities that we are creating for our youth in the Western Cape.

In the 2019 systemics, we have seen some pleasing improvements once again, and Grade 6 is the star grade this

year, with improvements of 2 percentage points in Mathematics, and 4.3 percentage points in Language across the province!

But looking at our performance since 2011, it really is very pleasing. The pass rate for Grade 6 Mathematics has increased by a whopping 21 percentage points since 2011, with Grades 3 and 9 also showing an improvement of 10.9 and 12.3 percentage points respectively.

In Language, a remarkable 14.5 percentage point increase has been achieved in Grade 3, with Grade 6 and 9 results having improved by 11.3 and 9.4 percentage points respectively. So well done to all of you.

Very pleasingly, in Quintile 1 schools, in Mathematics, both Grade 3 and Grade 6 learners increased their pass rates by 3 percentage points or more between 2018 and 2019. The increase of 5.4 percentage points in the Grade 6 language pass rate between 2018 and 2019 is especially noteworthy.

In Quintile 2 schools, language pass rates for Grade 3 and 6 have more than doubled since 2011, and in Grade 9 a further 2.1 percentage point increase from 2018 to 2019 was achieved. Mathematics pass rates have also increased substantially since 2011, including a truly excellent 30.7 percentage point increase for Grade 6 learners.

Quintile 3 schools have worked hard to increase their pass rates for language in Grade 6 by 1.3 percentage points, and Grade 9 by 1.1 percentage points, from 2018 scores.

We really are making great strides in reducing the inequalities in our system.

So, improving Language and Mathematics skills will remain a core priority for the WCED. But I am also very pleased that we are not only focusing on these. Our embracing of the Arts, Agriculture and Coding and Computational skills is exciting, and much needed in order to give our children a holistic education and equip them far better for the world of work when they leave school. It will also hopefully help them to stay in school for longer, although of course that creates more problems for us in respect of space and staffing, but that is a nice problem to have.

With the extreme pressures on our budget, it is essential for us to work transversally across departments in our government, with other spheres of government, and also establish, maintain and grow partnerships with external stakeholders in order to achieve our objectives. We started that in the last term of office, and are definitely continuing it in this term.

And because we have a definite, clear plan, and also because of the incredible work all of you are doing every day, people are more and more keen to work with us. It

seems they are also getting to the point of stopping to try and be “politically correct”, and want to work with a government that actually gets things DONE.

And things certainly are getting done in the Western Cape, and I want to share some encouraging stories today, because we need to remind ourselves continually why we are doing what we do every day. So I’m going to use our STEAMAC focus for the rest of my speech.

Sciences

In the area of the sciences, this morning I visited Mbekweni primary to acknowledge the work of an amazing teacher, Ms Zandiswa Matomane, who has one of her learners, Inganathi Kondile, who was placed second in the country last year in the Social Sciences Olympiad. She is a beautiful and intelligent young woman, who is planning to be a doctor, and is going later this year to participate in a programme at the SKA in Sutherland. Just yesterday I wasn’t sure if I would be able to get to the school because taxi drivers were shooting each other. The area is full of social problems, drug issues and a high dropout problem, but here is this Grade 7 who is competing against the best in the country, and achieving.

Technology

As a result of our Collaboration Schools model, and especially what has been done at Jakes Gerwel in Bonnievale, a number of different communities are coming forward wanting to do something similar, which really is exciting. There is huge buy-in for increasing the number of technical schools and schools of skill. This is going to be our Apex priority until 2024, and I am excited too about the possibilities this is bringing. I am hoping to do a study tour of Switzerland and Austria to see how they manage to incorporate workplace experience during schooling, which I really would like to see more of. Our research shows that Botswana is implementing a version of the Swiss model, so I would like to also see that, and then try to find a way of implementing it in our context.

Wynberg Boys' High School has recently opened a technical wing, with predominantly donor funding and voluntary contributions of expertise. This encourages me for three reasons. One, because people who can afford it are prepared to contribute. Secondly, because it is an established school of excellence, and by including technical education in their school they are helping to remove the stigma that has existed for too long, that technical education is somehow not quite for the best students. And thirdly, because the next vision is to provide something similar at the girls' school!

And then we have my newfound favourite place – Van Wyksdorp. I had never heard of it a year ago, but I am now

quite the regular. They, too, are wanting to do a smaller version of Jakes Gerwel to provide technical skills to their community. They have already started building a complex and I was privileged to open their hall last week – a lovely solar powered, energy efficient hall. They have also, through a spekboom project, basically eliminated their unemployment within 7-10 years as a result of this Jobs for Carbon project, whilst contributing to combating climate change and environmental rehabilitation. This has already spread to Calitzdorp.

And now they want to establish a small technical high school to ensure that their youth receive the skills they need to be productive members of society.

Things are getting done in the Western Cape.

Engineering

On the engineering front, we are working on a very exciting project with an aeronautical engineer. It is taking shape , although taking too long – but I am really hoping that this year we will finalise plans to start an aeronautical sciences school in the Winelands. We have a flying school that is willing to partner with us also, and this would provide opportunities for in-school flying training. It will be small,

initially, but hopefully then we can attract some external funding in time from relevant industries.

Arts

Since we have started to re-focus on the Arts, it seems to have really invigorated our Arts curriculum people, and there has been a hive of activity. Last year a highlight for me was the event at the Zeitz Mocca museum, where we had the opportunity to listen to the legendary Gcina Mhlophe, and the cherry on the top was the star appearance by the SG in a play – a stellar performance – he has another option when he leaves this position.

Our partnership with the Artscape and the department of Cultural Affairs and Sport is producing an outstanding programme. I recently saw the Artscape diary of the amazing plans they have for the year, for school-goers to both watch, and participate in. This includes the networks. I was most amused to see that Hamlet is STILL a matric network! Some things really do never change.

Mathematics

I was approached a few weeks ago by someone who was very excited - and she doesn't normally get excited about much - and introduced to a very interesting Maths programme online that runs a diagnostic assessment per

learner, and essentially generates personalized content to address backlogs. In a pilot they have done in Mpumalanga, there has been significant success, with years of gaps being addressed in a matter of months. We have a probable donor to fund a pilot here, and I have asked Dr Beets to formulate one as soon as possible. If it yields results similar to those seen in Mpumalanga, it holds huge promise for increasing the number of learners taking, understanding, and hopefully enjoying, pure Maths. I remain concerned about our performance in maths. We do not have enough people taking it to matric and passing it, and it has dire effects on our economy. So the numeracy interventions as a result of the systemic test results are crucial for the success of our economy – it's as simple as that.

Agriculture

Another important area for our economy is agriculture. I must say that school presents so many opportunities compared to when I was at school.

Two weeks ago I visited De Rust Futura Agricultural school in Grabouw. And I am determined that we must find a way to showcase the interesting ways that one can learn, and how important technology is in every sphere, including

agriculture. I saw a cow stepping into an enclosure where it is weighed. It has a RFID tag on its ear that tells you where and when it was born, its weight, and what vaccinations it has had, and when. So when they are sold for breeding, potential buyers know exactly what they are buying.

I saw how the principal uses plants to teach maths and science, by calculating PH levels of soil in different plants and then working out the average. And they have a very – excuse the pun – fruitful partnership with Paul Cluver's farm right next door, with exciting possibilities for expansion.

I have even seen a robotic milking machine which is connected to an app that measures how much milk comes from the cow into the truck, to calculate how much the farmer should be paid. So we need our

Coding and Computational Skills

We have identified computational skills as another crucial aspect for our youth to learn. And as a consequence of our years of focus on e-learning, and especially the last five, we are making excellent progress.

Our e-learning team under the leadership of Clinton Walker is charging ahead, despite the absence of a formal curriculum. Schools are establishing coding clubs – last time I heard there were already 80. Ismail Teladia and Gafieza

Ismail have worked with Google to develop a curriculum for online safety. They launched the Web Rangers project to train people from different schools to educate their peers on how to keep themselves safe online. And now there is an actual curriculum that they have developed, which I have asked to present to the Council of Education Ministers next week.

So, things really are getting done. And it is vital that our children get the basics right at a young age, so that they can take advantage of all these wonderful opportunities. I look forward to the launch of our Reading Strategy in March!

There is no doubt that times are tough. But, as the Premier said in his State of the Province Address last week, this does not mean we will simply accept that the ship is sinking. We will continue to do everything within our power to improve the education of our children.

With your continued help, we can ensure that the Western Cape continues to stand out as a beacon of hope in our country, and the springboard for a successful future for all our young people.

So I want to end off by congratulating all the award winners this evening, and once again thank all of you for your continued commitment to education.