

Education in the Western Cape

Strategic Priorities for Education 2009 – 2019 – One year on

Progress report
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WESTERN CAPE
Education Department

Provincial Government of the Western Cape

Introduction

Exactly a year ago, the Western Cape Provincial Government released its strategic plan for education 2010 – 2019. The overarching objective of this plan is to improve learner outcomes in this province dramatically.

When formulating this objective we realized that there was no quick fix when it comes to improving the quality of education provided in the Western Cape, and that it is only through a sustained, focused and systematic approach that we would achieve the objectives that we have set for ourselves.

Therefore, the plan focused on 10 key priority areas that aim to improve the life chances of all learners in the province through the provision of quality education.

One year on, the Western Cape Government can confidently say that we have made significant progress in laying the necessary foundation to achieve our objective of improving learner outcomes in the Western Cape. The following report summarises our progress to date.

Donald Grant
Minister of Education, Western Cape

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Literacy and numeracy

Strategic goal – We will improve literacy and numeracy outcomes by directing maximum resources (both human and financial) to the first three years of schooling. This will be coupled with compulsory testing of learners from Grades 1 to 6 from 2010 throughout the province. Benchmarks and targets will be set for each school.

The Western Cape Government continues to lead the rest of the country in the use of extensive testing for learners, and this year, the WCED made significant inroads in expanding the literacy and numeracy testing programme even further.

In previous years, the WCED tested Grade 3 and 6 learners in alternative years. However, this year, Grade 3 and 6 learners took part in the test in the same year, and most notably, for the first time in South Africa, Grade 9 learners were tested.

The WCED has set bold targets to improve literacy and numeracy in the province by 2014. The results of this year's testing will determine the new targets that will be set by each school.

In order further to improve our literacy and numeracy strategy, the Western Cape Government, is currently implementing recommendations made by Professor Servaas van der Berg and his team from CPUT and the University of Stellenbosch. Central to these recommendations is an increased focus on the role of Foundation Phase curriculum advisors (CAs) in regularly observing classroom practice for extended periods, specifically to observe levels of cognitive demand, pacing and time on task. Since the release of the report, Foundation Phase CAs have undergone training in effective monitoring of classroom practice for implementation in 2011.

Another key recommendation was to expand access to textbooks in the Foundation Phase. The WCED has already purchased textbooks for Grades 2 and 3 for 2011, which will complement the nationally produced work books as well as the provision of readers.

Accountability

Strategic goal – All officials and principals will sign performance contracts with targets for improving learner performance. These contracts will be monitored on a quarterly basis. There will also be far greater attention focused on the management of schools at the district level, with officials and teachers held to account for their role in improving individual school performance.

This administration believes that we can achieve excellence in education only through ensuring accountability for performance throughout the system.

Accountability begins at the top and the reform of education in this province needs to start by holding senior management accountable. To this end, this year, Provincial Education Minister Donald Grant and Head of the Department, Penny Vinjevold, signed performance contracts which are directly linked to improving learner outcomes.

The Western Cape Provincial School Education Amendment Bill is currently before the provincial legislature. Once approved, the Bill will include provisions that will enable the WCED effectively to evaluate the performance of schools and to administer the signing of performance agreements for principals and, deputy principals. This will for the first time see Principals and Deputy Principal's performance directly linked to learner outcomes. We are confident that this will effectively increase the levels of accountability within the system.

Another exciting development in these tests is the pilot for individual learner results. In past years, reports of the results have only identified the provincial, district and school averages. With effect from 2012, parents will receive individualized report cards on their child's performance in these tests.

We will further strengthen levels of accountability in 2011 by expecting a quarterly assessment of curriculum coverage in the classroom. This will allow for an early warning system to be developed, which will see any teacher falling behind with the curriculum being provided with targeted assistance and support to ensure that this shortcoming is remedied.

In 2010, a similar system for oversight was created. Each of our High Schools in the province was asked to set targets for the number of learners who will pass the 2010 National Senior Certificate examinations. These targets created a much needed sense of focus and urgency in the system and will be used as one of the benchmarks for evaluating performance once the results have been released early next year.

Faster response times and support

Strategic goal – We will improve the responsiveness and efficiency of the WCED through a focus on changing the organizational culture and improving the department’s business processes and systems. The Head Office and District offices of the WCED will be structured, designed and equipped to provide rapid response service and support to schools and teachers.

In order to allow for far greater targeted and specific assistance to underperforming schools, the WCED has restructured how they respond and act to support our schools, focusing specifically on schools that are underperforming.

In January, the WCED contacted all the 167 schools that achieved a pass rate of more than 90% in 2009, and informed them that they would receive assistance from the districts only on request so that officials have to focus only on schools that are in real need of assistance.

In schools achieving between 60% and 89%, particular support was identified to help improve in specific areas, and in schools with under 60%, detailed plans for improvements and support were developed. This system has worked effectively throughout the course of the year, and will be repeated in 2011.

The WCED will be adopting a similar approach to support in 2011 in our primary schools. Schools will be grouped into categories based on their literacy and numeracy performance with targeted assistance for the weaker performing schools.

Another area of improvement in the last year is the radical acceleration in filling vacancies. In the last few years, only two vacancy lists were published each year. However, this year seven vacancy lists were published in order to improve

turnaround times in the appointment process.

There has been a specific focus on principal appointments, ensuring that posts are filled as soon as possible so that the new principal can set the tone of management and leadership in the school as quickly as possible, and to ensure greater stability.

It is most pleasing to note that according to the WCED 2010 Customer Satisfaction Report, which rates the levels of service delivery in our Head Office and District offices, there have been substantial improvements in the assessment of educators and principal’s of the responsiveness and efficiency of the WCED, compared to 2009.

Another area of improvement is the allocation of posts in schools. This year, schools were notified in an unprecedented development in September about the posts that would be made available to them for 2011 school year. This allows schools to plan and budget ahead more efficiently. The allocation of posts saw the actual number of posts allocated to schools increased and schools remaining largely stable.

Improving teacher morale

Strategic goal – We will reduce the administrative workload of teachers to provide more time for teaching. Teachers will be provided with texts on time. Teachers will also be provided with opportunities for ongoing professional development and training. Officials will provide administrative and academic support to teachers and schools on demand.

In order to assist educators to prepare for the year ahead, the WCED released in September a planning calendar for the 2011 school year. This allows for advanced planning and most importantly to minimize any time spent outside of the classroom, as training will largely take place after school and/or on weekends. The training has also become much more focused, with compulsory training for teachers at underperforming schools and far greater choice for teachers at good performing schools.

In order to support teachers in the classroom, 3 500 of our Western Cape educators have been selected to receive a laptop as part of the national

Teacher Laptop Initiative. We are confident that this will assist in making teaching more organised and professional, and will help our educators with their administrative tasks, lesson plan development and can be used for further research and development.

Teacher morale will also be improved as the administrative workload of teachers will be substantially reduced with the introduction of the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS), which after a year of preparation in 2011, will be phased in from 2012.

We are acutely aware of the contribution that teachers make to improving the lives of the learners of this province and we remain determined to ensure that teachers are treated as the valued professionals they are.

Quality texts and materials

Strategic goal – The WCED will, over the next three years, ensure that every classroom is text-rich with reading books for each Grade 1-6 classroom and textbooks for all grades 4-12 for each subject. Incentives for textbook recovery and use will be provided. We will also make greater use of technology to deliver a quality curriculum into the classroom.

This government is firmly of the belief that textbooks are an essential educational resource for the development of reading, writing and language skills, and we are well on our way to meeting the objective as detailed above.

For example, this year, the WCED has gone beyond the national norm for textbook allocation, by initiating additional textbook top-ups. We have this year provided an additional 15 000 textbooks to Grade 12 learners in the seven core subjects in a top-up programme.

We also targeted the Foundation Phase or Grades 1 to 3. In total, we have allocated an additional R101 million for the purchase of textbooks throughout the system.

The WCED has also already purchased textbooks for Grades 2 and 3 for 2011, which will complement the nationally produced workbooks as well as the provision of readers.

Recently, the WCED launched a campaign to

encourage learners of all grades to hand in their textbooks at the end of each school year. This campaign will not only help the WCED to extend the range of texts we can buy with the available funds, but will ensure that all learners have a textbook in their hands at the start of the school year.

In terms of technology, the WCED is pleased that the Western Cape is leading the rest of the country in the delivery and roll-out of ICT infrastructure in our schools and we are confident that by the end of the 2011/2012 financial year, technology will be incorporated in every school in the Western Cape through our Khanya Project.

1 225 of our schools in the province now benefit from this project, with another 166 schools currently in various stages of preparation for the next wave of implementation.

Another initiative that has achieved remarkable success in using technology to deliver a quality curriculum, is the Interactive Telematics Programme. The programme includes broadcasting lessons from a studio at Stellenbosch University to learners in 120 schools across the province using satellite technology, laptops and cell phones, creating a kind of 'cyber-classroom' which makes it possible for the WCED to reach large numbers of learners and provide them with quality individual tutoring.

Redress

Strategic goal – The WCED will direct its human and financial resources to those districts and schools that have historically experienced under-investment.

In order to redress the needs of some of our disadvantaged schools, the WCED has provided targeted assistance to our underperforming schools.

As mentioned above, this year, high schools achieving good results will receive assistance only if and when they need it. This 'you call us approach' is in line with our principle of leaving those schools who perform well alone, and allows us instead to focus the majority of our resources on those schools that desperately need proper and sustained remedial action and support. A

similar approach will be adopted in our primary schools in 2011.

Interventions in our underperforming schools include intensive management support from our district offices, subject specific support for schools with historically low pass rates, and the delivery of additional textbooks in critical subject areas.

As part of our "Own your own future. Own your own success. Study hard to pass your matric" campaign, increased support was given to all schools with passes below the provincial average by providing a tutoring programme for complex areas of the syllabus, holiday camps and the provision of a 'tips for success booklet' to every Grade 12 learner in the province. 2010 has seen unprecedented levels of support to our Grade 12 learners, most specially in Khayelitsha, Langa, Gugulethu and Mitchell's Plain.

School maintenance

Strategic goal – The WCED will develop a list of priorities for infrastructure maintenance and will adopt the most cost effective and efficient means of maintaining schools, including public-private partnerships.

At the end of last year, the Department conducted a baseline audit of all the schools in the province to ascertain where we should target our immediate infrastructure interventions. In February, we released our infrastructure plan, which includes the building of 25 new schools over the current MTEF, the replacement of 20 schools that were built with inappropriate materials, the building of additional relief classrooms in successful schools in order to expand access to quality education, and the installation of mobile classrooms at schools where there is severe overcrowding.

This year we have already successfully installed 145 mobile units, and 107 classrooms are either currently under construction or are in the final stages of design and planning at some of our successful schools. Ten schools are currently in various stages of construction in the province, with a further 15 schools in the planning stages. Fifteen schools that are to be replaced are also in the planning stages, with four schools expected

for completion next year.

Through careful planning and the use of economies of scale substantial savings have been made, these savings, will in turn be used to fund other aspects of the WCED's infrastructure improvement plan and additional maintenance to our schools.

Poverty and crime

Strategic goal – Poverty and crime impact severely on learning. The WCED, in collaboration with other government departments and civil society organisations, will provide food and other poverty-alleviation measures to address the needs of poor learners. We will strive to make schools safer through physical safety measures, greater co-operation with the SAPS and Metro Police (using schemes such as rent-a cop) and actively promoting community involvement in protecting schools. In addition, the WCED with other government departments and the SAPS will conduct random inspections and tests at schools for drugs and weapons.

This year, the WCED's school nutrition programme expanded to include over 14 000 additional learners. Currently, 349 000 learners receive meals at 998 schools in the province.

We have also placed a special emphasis on using this money to try to provide more nutritious meals to young, exceptionally poor and vulnerable learners. Cooked meals are served on all five of the school days and now include an increase in food items such as fresh fruit, vegetables, tinned fish and lentils.

In terms of school safety, there have been ongoing random school searches by SAPS as requested by the Minister, throughout the year, in search of illegal drugs and weapons. Once passed, the Western Cape Provincial School Education Amendment Bill, will place further prohibitions on dangerous objects, illegal drugs and liquor on school premises, and will provide greater powers to conduct search and seizure operations at schools.

We have also strengthened the relationship between SAPS and our schools, by linking sector

commanders to individual school with monitoring systems in place.

The Safe Schools Division has also been further strengthened; many of its operations have been integrated with schools, ensuring that each school has assigned to it a safety resource officer.

A number of public community meetings on school safety have also been held this year. This helped to ensure that communities take ownership of their schools, which is a critical element in ensuring the long-term safety of these schools.

Migration and new schools

Strategic goal – The Western Cape government will use the best available research to plan for the in-migration to the Western Cape and use research trends to ensure that schools and teachers are available to provide quality education to children who enter the province.

In planning for in-migration, the WCED has identified a number of areas expected to experience high levels of demand at the beginning of 2011. These include Kuilsriver, Mfuleni, Hout Bay, Delft, Du Noon, Wallacedene, Plettenberg Bay, Mossel Bay and George.

Most of these areas have schools that serve rapidly growing communities. Therefore, officials will be prepared on the first day of the school year to work with schools to find places for these children and to finalise late registrations. They will also help schools to finalise timetables and to resolve staffing, administrative and security issues, where necessary.

The infrastructure audit that was released earlier this year, identified areas where there was a need to build new schools because of migration. These areas have been targeted through our infrastructure plan, with the building of an additional 25 schools in the province.

School management and leadership

Strategic goal – The WCED will provide targeted management training and in-school support to all members of school management and SGBs.

A number of principal training workshops were held this year, and in September, 280 of our school principals attended a principals' conference which offered a wide range of sessions reflecting the different skills needed to become a "lead manager" of a school. Principals have already been informed about the various seminars on offer for 2011, in the planning calendar sent out in September to all schools.

It is important that this type of training is in line with the relevant legislation and policy and that the unfolding demands and needs of schools are met.

The Western Cape Schools Education Amendment Bill currently before the legislature introduces a number of important changes which will impact on the nature and content of such training. In addition, new disciplinary processes and a code of conduct for school governing bodies will necessitate extensive training and orientation for the leadership of our schools, both principals and school governors.

The appointment of an Education Council will flow from the changed legislation and we expect the various roleplayers involved in this council will also contribute to the identification of relevant training needs.

Conclusion:

While the Western Cape still has some way to go to achieve the objectives set out in our strategic plan, we can definitely be pleased with the progress we have made so far.

One year on, and the foundations have been laid. In 2011, we will continue to build on these foundations, specifically targeting the early phases of learning as well as, ensuring that our Department is available and ready to give the necessary support to schools in need.

The 2010 literacy and numeracy results will allow us to determine new targets for primary schools, as well as, where to focus our strategies.

It is with great anticipation that we will wait for the release of the 2010 NSC results. These results will determine whether the strategies we have put in place this year have been successful and provide us with new targets for 2011.

We will continue to monitor the progress made in our infrastructure plan, and the increase of textbooks provision across the board.

Finally, we will ensure that the needs of learners are continually put first, and will do everything we can to ensure that teachers are treated as the valued professionals that they are.

Every decision taken in relation to education in the Western Cape will continue to be informed by the need to improve learner outcomes in this province, and to provide greater access to quality education.