

Speeches

Statement by the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, MP, on the announcement of the National Senior Certificate Grade 12 Examination results for 2009 at the Media Centre, Union Buildings, Pretoria on 07 January

Good morning to all learners, teachers, principals and parents listening to the radio or watching these proceedings on national television.

I want to also welcome all education stakeholders and members of the media present today on this very significant occasion as we announce the results of the National Senior Certificate Grade 12 examinations for 2009.

I am pleased to be announcing the results of all nine provinces today, including the results of Mpumalanga. As you know, Umalusi, the Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training, took the decision on Monday 4 January 2010 to delay the approval of the release of the results for Mpumalanga while their rigorous checking of the province's examination results continued. The Umalusi Chairperson, Prof Volmink, informed me last night that following a rigorous process, the Council found no evidence of a systemic problem in Mpumalanga, and was therefore satisfied that the Mpumalanga results are credible and could thus be released by the Department.

Following Umalusi's decision and the report that I received following the investigation into the leaks of the examination papers in Mpumalanga, I met with the Premier of Mpumalanga and the MEC for Education on Monday 04 January 2010. We agreed that there is a need to defend the integrity and standing of the examination process in Mpumalanga and that the examination structures in the Mpumalanga Education Department will immediately be re-constituted. We also agreed that the national Department will from 2010 assume responsibility for the administration of the National Senior Certificate examination process in Mpumalanga until the necessary systems are in place in the province.

In addition, we have requested the Special Investigation Unit of the SAPS, the HAWKS, to get involved in the investigation of the reported irregularities so that we can get to the root cause of the problem in Mpumalanga once and for all. Those found guilty of stealing and selling question papers are criminals and will be punished to the full extent of the law.

Our examination system is maturing and we are pleased with the smooth administration of the examinations in all provinces, except Mpumalanga. Umalusi found that our examinations are comparable to the best in the world and that the cognitive levels in most questions papers were of a high standard. The National Curriculum Statement itself is a cognitively more demanding curriculum than that of the past which is something that we will continue to strengthen. There is also a positive trend towards the improvement of quality in the system, particularly given the strengthening of pass requirements.

It is pleasing to note that the system is stabilising. Umalusi was able to use the raw scores in the majority of subjects. Out of the 57 subjects that were standardised, 41 subjects were accepted as raw scores. Of those that were adjusted, 6 were adjusted downwards and 10 were adjusted upwards. Umalusi pointed out that in none of the cases were adjustments made that exceeded the maximum adjustment allowed in either direction and most adjustments were relatively minor.

I am satisfied that Umalusi has fulfilled its statutory mandate of ensuring that the examination results approved for release are credible, including the results of the Mpumalanga province. I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the Council and Prof Volmink for the professional manner in which they execute what is clearly a very difficult task. I am pleased that Umalusi has confirmed the quality and integrity of our examinations.

We have seen some positive gains in the results of the class of 2009. There is an increase in the number of passes over 40% and an increased number of Bachelors passes from 18% to 32%. This means that there is a greater number of learners who will be eligible to access Higher Education.

A positive feature of the 2009 exams has been that more learners have registered for Mathematics (296 659) than for Mathematical Literacy (284 309). The results for Mathematics also show greater differentiation at the upper levels, despite an overall decline in the pass rate. The performances of learners in the gateway subjects of Maths, Physical Science and Accounting however remain cause for concern.

In addition, while performance in Languages continues to be a challenge, there has been an improvement in the performance of English First Additional Language. Large numbers of our learners are learning in English and it is pleasing to note that the trend is upwards. Moreover, a total of 417 schools have achieved a 100% pass rate across the country. It is also pleasing to note that the number of schools performing with an under 20% pass rate has declined.

However, the results I place before you today continue to suggest that we have not yet turned the corner in education. We have not yet reached the quality learning outcomes that we are striving for as a nation. The education system continues to be plagued by obvious weaknesses that act as barriers to the performance of our learners. We must continue to intensify our efforts to address these weaknesses.

The National Senior Certificate examinations in 2009 involved a total of 580 577 full time candidates. Learners wrote a total of 197 papers in nearly 7 000 centres and the papers were marked by more than 30 000 markers. This meant that the marks of a total of around 12 million papers were captured during the entire process.

The national pass rate of the National Senior Certificate examinations for 2009 is 60.7%. This means that there is a slight decline in the pass rate from 2008 of 2% across the country.

I wish to state directly that even though this shift is marginal, I am most unhappy with the decline in the national pass rate and indeed in the overall pass rate of just over 60%. The National Senior Certificate is an important indicator of the quality of our education system, and as a country we cannot afford to allow our young people to achieve results that are in the main average or below average.

In announcing the provincial results, I would like to commend KwaZulu-Natal as that province has shown an improvement in the pass rate of 3.5%, up from 57.6% in 2008 to 61.1% in 2009. The province is to be commended on its efforts. I am also pleased to report that the results in the Eastern Cape have stabilised at around 50%. Both these provinces are essentially rural in character with high rates of poverty, but both have shown that they have managed to buck the downward trend of the past years and have begun the turn around.

I am however disappointed in the overall results within particular provinces. Those in the Free State declined by 2.4%, and the pass rates in the Western Cape and North West provinces have declined by 2.7% and 0.5% respectively. In addition, the pass rate in Limpopo declined by 5.4% and that of the Northern Cape by a staggering 11%. Gauteng's pass rate has also shown a decline of 4.6%. Mpumalanga has registered the poorest performance with a pass rate of 47.9%, a decline of 3.9%.

These disappointing results indicate that we need to take urgent steps to address the performance of the system which impacts on the performance of our learners. As Umalusi has stated, we cannot compromise on the high standards that we aim to achieve. Indeed, it is through maintaining the standards of our examinations that we are able to assess the shortcomings in the quality of learning and teaching.

My Ministry is determined to ensure that steps are taken to improve the system so that our goals of quality learning and teaching are realised. We have focussed particularly on Mathematics, Physical Science and Accounting. We need to do far more in these subjects particularly - and indeed in all subjects - to ensure that we improve the quality of teaching through the strengthening of the curriculum skills of our teachers, particularly in their methodology and content knowledge.

The NSC results also show that we need to improve the support to schools. We must acknowledge that there is poor teaching in many of our schools. Management in our schools is often weak and lacks leadership and commitment. Our systems are also often inefficient. We still face major challenges in the sciences and need to strengthen our interventions in this area.

In 2010 we shall strengthen our interventions to ensure that the class of 2010 shows a significant improvement.

Our provincial education department officials must support our schools by ensuring that textbooks and other teaching and learning materials are provided on time and that real teaching and learning are taking place in all our schools from the beginning of the school year.

We have already taken note of the Report on the Implementation of the National Curriculum Statement handed over to me in September 2009. This report indicated the urgent need to improve the quality of teaching in our schools in order to deliver our curriculum. We have taken this forward with the establishment of a Teacher

Development Branch in the reconfigured Department of Basic Education. This Branch will focus on increasing the support to teachers in terms of strengthening teaching skills and content knowledge.

We have also taken steps to implement from the beginning of this school year some of the recommendations of the Report that will go a long way to ensuring that our teachers and learners will be able to focus more on teaching and learning. We have streamlined some of the current curriculum and assessment policies. For example, teachers will only be required to keep one file for administrative purposes for planning, moderation and record keeping. In addition, learners will no longer be required to have portfolios in all subjects or learning areas and the number of projects that they will be required to do for each subject or learning area has been reduced to one per subject/learning area per year.

We recognise that the NSC results are an important indicator of the quality of our education system. While the nation rightly takes great interest in the NSC performance of our learners, we should all be reminded that we cannot only sit up and pay attention to our learners when they enter the Further Education and Training Band in grade 10 or begin to concern ourselves when they reach Grade 12. We need to remember that good teaching and learning need to take place from Grade R. My Department recognises the necessity for the development of strong foundational skills. From this year, the Department of Basic Education will extend the Foundations for Learning Programme to all primary schools to ensure the improvement of the foundational skills of literacy and numeracy.

We will also continue to strengthen our focus on improving the functionality of our schools. We know that in terms of school performance, the role of principals is key. We will focus on training principals in order to strengthen their management skills and to ensure that they are fully supported in their role by the system as a whole. We are also planning to build the capacity of our School Governing Bodies who should play a significant role in guiding the school and ensuring the involvement of the parent community in their children's education. We will continue to mobilise our communities to involve themselves in the education of our children throughout the year. As President Zuma has said "Education is a societal issue".

Through our Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign, we have secured the commitment of our various education stakeholders, including teacher unions representing teachers, school governing body associations representing parents, and learner organisations to working together to achieve quality education in South Africa. We have also encouraged the private sector to grow its efforts to support education development.

In addition, I have had discussions with my provincial counterparts and each has indicated specific plans to support schools in their provinces. This media briefing will be followed by briefings in each province.

I have directed the Acting Director-General of Basic Education to develop an Education Sector Plan for presentation to me by the end of March 2010. This plan must become a blueprint for action and will set out systematically how the education system must be strengthened. We must bring in the best experts to advise the system and we shall work closely with Higher Education in this regard. We must all work differently in the education system. The system needs to direct its energies at strengthening direct support to schools, through the development of turn-around strategies from provinces. We must ensure that the system is capable of carrying out direct intervention in schools. Every learner in every school in South Africa has the right to quality learning and teaching and it is our responsibility to ensure that this right is met.

As Minister, I wish to now congratulate those learners who have performed well in the NSC. I also need to take the opportunity to encourage those learners who have not succeeded to try again. We do not always succeed the first time round. There is always a second chance. Make use of those chances through hard work and commitment. Learners who have been unsuccessful and who qualify for the supplementary examinations must register at their schools for the supplementary examinations which will take place in March 2010. All provinces must ensure that interventions are put in place to ensure that these learners are adequately supported to pass the one or two subjects they require to be awarded a National Senior Certificate.

I want to thank our dedicated teachers and principals who have committed themselves to the delivery of quality teaching and learning. I also want to acknowledge the role of our school governing bodies and parents who continue to support our schools and learners.

Let me in conclusion, thank the Deputy Minister Mr Enver Surty for his constant support and guidance, the Acting Director General: Basic Education Mr Bobby Soobrayan and the Director- General of Education, Mr Duncan Hindle. I also want to extend a special thanks to the Examinations Section in the National Department, as well as to all our provincial examinations officials.

I thank you.