



basic education

Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Keynote Address by the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, MP, at the Official Opening of Goakanya Primary School, North West

03 May 2024

Programme Director, Dr S.H. Mvula,

Acting North West Education Superintendent General, Mr M.V.

Seshibe,

North West Education MEC, Hon. N.V. Motsumi,

Traditional and Religious Leaders present,

Bojanala District Director, Dr M. Paledi,

Chairperson of the School Governing Body and Members,

Learners,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honour and privilege to address you at this significant event, the official handover of a brand-new primary school to the community that first broke ground in 1955.

Today, we stand on the threshold of a new era in basic education for the community of Phasha Maloka.

It is with great pride that we embrace the vision of Goakanya Primary School: "To provide quality education for a better life." This vision resonates deeply with our national ethos and historical aspirations, as articulated in the foundational documents of our democracy. The 1955 Freedom Charter, a seminal text in our struggle for justice, boldly declared the need to open the doors of learning and culture for all.

This principle of providing quality basic education to achieve a Better Life for All has guided us towards a society where basic education is not only a tool for personal advancement but a collective bridge to greater understanding, social cohesion, and means to address socio-economic challenges.

Echoing this in our first democratic elections, the 1994 ANC Manifesto promised a "Better Life for All."

This commitment has since shaped our pro-poor policies and actions, steering our educational reforms to ensure that every child in South Africa has access to a learning environment that nurtures their potential and equips them for the challenges and opportunities of the future.

As we gather here today to celebrate this new beginning at Goakanya Primary School, we reaffirm our commitment to these promises and commitments. This institution stands as a testament to our ongoing mission to transform our educational landscape, embodying our collective aspiration for a better, more inclusive South Africa.

Over the past 30 years, our nation has embarked on a transformative journey to improve educational access and infrastructure, ensuring our children receive the quality basic education they deserve, and that is in line with section 29 of the Constitution, which guarantees the right to basic education.

In line with the Freedom Charter's call to open the doors of learning, we have surpassed targets and set new records.

Since the advent of democracy, the basic education sector in South Africa has undergone transformative growth and improvement.

From an under-resourced and racially segregated system, the sector has evolved to achieve near-universal access for the compulsory schooling age group of 7 to 15 years by 2021, with attendance rates between 97% and 99%.

This monumental achievement was supported by pro-poor policies that drastically reduced the costs associated with school attendance, thereby enhancing access.

These pro-poor policies include the highly acclaimed National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP), which now provides nutritious meals to over 9.6 million learners across 21,274 ordinary public schools. It's more than just a meal; it's a lesson on the importance of food and the skills to grow it.

The success of the NSNP isn't solely a governmental triumph; it epitomises the collaborative potential of the public and private sectors.

The story of the National School Nutrition Programme is multifaceted, weaving in elements of community, collaboration, and empowerment.

Through this initiative, thousands have found economic opportunities, with 61,314 volunteers from local communities cooking meals and receiving a stipend for their invaluable service.

The broader, intangible impact is evident in our schools. Reports highlight improved punctuality, attendance, and an enhanced eagerness to learn, underscoring the belief that well-nourished children are better positioned to seize educational opportunities optimally.

We are ardently working to introduce breakfasts across all National School Nutrition Programme schools.

The second pro-poor policy that has markedly improved the trajectory of basic education over the past 30 years is the implementation of no-fee schools in our country. This critical measure has significantly influenced both school attendance and educational equity.

According to the 2024 Basic Education Sector Review, this policy has led to substantial increases in school enrolment nationwide, with the percentage of learners paying fees dramatically reduced from 50% in 2009 to just 24% by 2022.

This considerable decline in fee-paying students highlights the policy's effectiveness in enhancing access to basic education, particularly for learners from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

The expansion of no-fee schools now encompasses 80% of ordinary public schools, demonstrating a solid commitment to educational accessibility.

Beyond merely enhancing school attendance, which achieved near-universal status in 2021, we have continued to progress despite persistent challenges, including safety in schools, crime, and various social ills.

In terms of infrastructure, we've renovated and built new schools, enhanced water and electricity infrastructure, and ensured that our learners study in environments conducive to teaching and learning.

Since the Democratic Breakthrough of 1994, the ANC-led Government has refurbished 11,077 schools and added 115,512 classrooms to alleviate overcrowding.

We have extended water infrastructure to 2,459 schools and electrified 8,313 schools.

Our commitment to providing secure and conducive learning environments is evidenced by the fencing provided to 5,605 schools.

Under the Accelerated School Infrastructure Delivery Initiative (ASIDI), by August 2023, we have replaced 510 schools previously constructed from inappropriate materials with 329 new, state-of-the-art schools. This initiative underscores our resolve to transform the educational landscape, fostering environments that nurture the intellectual growth of our learners.

Programme director, we celebrate a significant milestone in this journey at Goakanya Primary School today. Initially established in 1955 as 'Sandriver Bantu School,' the school was built through the collective effort of this community under the leadership of Reverend M Yekela and the first principal, Mr. M Tshoke.

The original structure, crafted from bricks made by local women using sand from the nearby river, exemplifies a legacy of community-driven development.

The transformation into the new Goakanya Primary School, which began in earnest in 2019 with demolishing some old blocks to make way for modern facilities, represents a continuation of this legacy.

By replacing dilapidated and unsuitable school buildings, we seek to address and restore the dignity of African learners, who have been deliberately deprived of access to facilities such as science laboratories, libraries, and proper sports fields for decades.

The school now boasts advanced infrastructure, including new classrooms and modern ablution facilities that align with our Sanitation Appropriate for Education (SAFE) programme, which has outfitted 3,015 schools with safe and age-appropriate sanitation facilities.

This initiative was critical following the tragic incidents involving pit latrines, and today, I am proud to say that Goakanya Primary School stands as a beacon of safety and sanitation dignity.

The investment in Goakanya Primary School is profound, reflecting not just fiscal expenditure but a profound investment in the future of this community.

The project created numerous employment opportunities during construction, directly benefiting local families and stimulating economic activity in Phasha Maloka.

Moreover, the school construction project significantly boosted local economic activity by involving a substantial number of Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs).

Specifically, the project engaged 58 local workers, directly benefiting the community by providing job opportunities to both skilled and unskilled residents.

Among these, a notable percentage are young people, emphasising the project's role in addressing youth unemployment in the area.

Furthermore, the project included a diverse array of local SMMEs, engaging 27 businesses that contributed various services ranging from plumbing and electrical work to material supply and plant hire.

This strategy supported the local economy and promoted skills development and entrepreneurial growth within the community. The emphasis on local participation ensures that the economic benefits of the school's construction are felt directly by the people of Phasha Village, reinforcing community pride and long-term investment in the area's development.

I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to every member of this community who has contributed to protecting and supporting this project. Your vigilance and dedication ensure this school will serve as a citadel of learning for future generations. Your demonstrable sense of ownership and stewardship will safeguard the legacy of Goakanya Primary School.

Programme director, the handover of this new facility isn't a vanity project designed to please a community during the election times. A new school in this community signals a new dawn not for learners or the community but for posterity.

As the basic education sector, we must reimagine and reshape educational spaces—not merely as buildings but as bastions of creativity, safety, and inclusivity.

It is within these nurturing grounds that we cultivate the next generation of leaders, thinkers, and innovators.

In realising this vision, we must appreciate that excellence in educational infrastructure extends beyond the structural. It encompasses a harmonious integration of architectural beauty and the functionality necessary to support a dynamic learning environment.

By achieving such excellence, our schools transcend conventional learning spaces; they become catalysts for academic and sporting excellence.

These facilities' meticulous design and upkeep send a powerful message to our learners: they are valued, their education is important, and their community is invested in their success.

Schools developed with this comprehensive approach, such as the new Goakanya Primary School, significantly enhance learner engagement and retention, setting a standard of educational excellence that aligns with the finest global practices.

Sir Ken Robinson, an influential voice in education, once said, "There's a wealth of talent that lies in all of us. All of us, including those who work in schools, must nurture creativity systematically and not kill it unwittingly."

This insight is at the heart of our mission to maintain and design aesthetically pleasing schools and sanctuaries where young minds feel nurtured and respected, thus encouraging creativity.

Conversely, when a school is dilapidated and neglected like this one was before today, it sends a disheartening message to its students.

Learners in poorly maintained environments often feel overlooked by the system, which can decrease their motivation and diminish their academic outcomes. This neglect fosters a cycle of educational disinterest and underachievement, perpetuating social inequalities.

Reflecting on the impact of our environment on well-being and productivity, the philosopher Alain de Botton, in his masterpiece "The Architecture of Happiness," reveals that architecture is far more than just a practical and functional necessity.

He asserts that it is, in fact, a powerful force that shapes our daily experiences and influences our perceptions of beauty, order, and meaning.

By investing in high-quality educational infrastructure, we are not just providing a space for learning; we are empowering our learners with the confidence to aspire and achieve. These investments signify our commitment to their futures and our belief in their potential.

As we endeavour to enhance our educational facilities, we must remember that the condition of the schools loudly communicates to learners how the community values basic education.

Creating and maintaining inspiring educational environments is crucial for nurturing a generation that feels respected, valued, and empowered to reach their full potential.

Dr. Maria Montessori's philosophy reinforces this, as she noted, "Children acquire knowledge through experience in the environment." This principle underscores our commitment to providing environments conducive to learning and supportive of holistic growth.

Let us continue to build educational institutions that serve as beacons of hope and catalysts of potential, ensuring that every child looks to the future with confidence and determination.

As we progress, we must note that Goakanya Primary School is a no-fee school. It is part of our pro-poor national policy to ensure that no learner is denied basic education because of their indigent household socio-economic background.

Additionally, our nutrition programmes are in place to ensure that every learner can receive a nutritious meal, understanding that nutrition is foundational to effective learning.

To drive the point home, *Programme Director*, the design of the new school was carefully considered to ensure it is not only visually appealing but functionally conducive to fostering higher academic performance.

As I have said before, studies and experience tell us that when learners are in a supportive and stimulating environment, their educational outcomes improve significantly.

In conclusion, as we celebrate this new chapter for Goakanya Primary School, let us reaffirm our commitment to the education of our youth. This school is more than just a structure; it is a promise of a brighter future, a nurturing ground for the next generation of educationists, teachers, leaders, innovators, and thinkers.

Let us all—educators, parents, and community members—continue to support, maintain, and protect this invaluable institution.

Thank you, and May Goakanya Primary School flourish for many years to come!