



basic education

Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Keynote Address by the Basic Education Minister Mrs Angie Motshekga delivered at the SANASE Conference for Special Education

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Programme Director

SANASE Chairperson

Principals of Special and Full-Service Schools

Members of Governing Bodies

Provincial and District Officials

Representatives of Disabled Peoples' Organisations

Parents

Distinguished Guests,

It is my singular honour and privilege to address you on this particular occasion, the 2022 national conference themed *Inclusivity Towards Vision 2030*.

The theme is timely and appropriate.

It forces even the laziest person to wake up from their slumber and focus on the core, inclusivity in basic education, not the peripherals or the grandiose concepts such as the pedagogy of the oppressed.

Additionally, the theme aligns with our grandiose vision to achieve significant milestones in all facets of our developmental goals by 2030, as referenced in the *National Development Plan* (NDP).

Thus, our role as education managers today is to lay a solid foundation for all South Africans to have access to basic education and training of the highest quality by 2030.

Every day, we must be seized with improving learning outcomes by focussing on the core, not sideshows that derail instead of enabling progress.

Programme Director, this occasion is central to the sector's work because it discusses inclusivity in basic education, which we know is linked to the universal right to education.

The right to education was first declared a fundamental human right in 1948 when our country began its backward march to the Stone Ages by declaring apartheid an official policy.

We are lucky to meet today under the circumstances different from our forebears.

Our country today is an oasis of democracy, fundamental human rights and progress.

As a result, the Constitution, the highest law in the land, demands that we as a Government honour the promise of inclusive basic education for all.

Furthermore, our Constitution enjoins us to create an environment where everyone will have access to lifelong learning, education and learning opportunities irrespective of the ability spectrum.

As you converge here today, you must be true to our mantra that says every learner is a national asset.

In other words, no learner must be left behind.

Programme Director, we have made significant strides in our mission to build an inclusive education and training system.

For this, I would like to convey my appreciation for the support displayed by SANASE and its sister organisations to realise the right of everyone to equitable access to basic education.

I particularly thank you for focussing your energies on the most vulnerable learners, those with special education needs.

The partnerships we share with various organisations are central to the success of our vision of ensuring that no child is left behind.

Since the adoption of Education White Paper 6 in July 2001 on inclusive education, we have more than doubled the number of learners with special needs who have access to basic education.

We keep making a clarion call for out-of-school youth with special educational needs to re-join the basic education sector and claim their place in the sun.

Our call to bring everyone on board aligns with the *2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development* and *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*.

These two policy initiatives provide a robust framework for ensuring inclusive growth and sustainable development as a precursor to inclusive economic growth.

We have to be deliberate about building a foundation for shared prosperity.

We must be intentional about providing equal opportunities for all, not just those in proximity to politicians.

We must be obsessive about freeing the potential of each child, not just our friends' children who live in Sandton.

We must be single-minded in using the power of basic education to bring children with special educational needs on board the basic education wagon.

Our mantra, no child left behind, must be seen in the number of disabled children with assistive learning devices, wheelchairs, computers, Braille materials and appropriate furniture.

We have to walk the talk.

No child left behind shouldn't be a slogan to harness the power of organisations in the sector to placate them, as it were.

Thus, this conference offers a unique opportunity to cement the constitutional injunction of building an inclusive, just and fair society where no one is left behind by act or omission.

Programme director, our immediate task as the 21st-century mandarins is to focus on the core of ensuring that no one is left behind, not the periphery of talking about the right to education.

The National Development Plan (NDP): Vision 2030 emphasises the importance of equal opportunities where success is determined not by birth but by ability, education and hard work.

Programme Director, we know that globally, more than a billion people live with some form of disability, of whom approximately 200 million experience some form of difficulty in functioning.

In the same breath, although rigorous interventions nations embark on, people with disabilities, in particular, often have poorer access to health, education, and economic participation.

Moreover, they are exposed to a higher degree of vulnerability to violence and lack of opportunities than people without disabilities.

These vulnerabilities including sexual violence are often more pronounced in developing contexts, such as ours, where socio-economic complexities remain a significant concern.

As you all know, these have recently been exacerbated by the outbreak of Covid-19, which has somewhat reversed some of the gains that we have made.

Programme Director, Chapter 4 of *Education White Paper 6* sets out what we should have achieved by June 2021.

This provides a rubric through which the sector's progress must be assessed and evaluated.

Our analysis of our scorecard in this regard reveals significant progress made amidst challenges.

For instance, the White Paper enjoined us to conduct a nationwide advocacy campaign to popularise the prescripts of the policy, which we have done pretty well.

Secondly, it directed us to mobilise out-of-school children and youth of school-going age to take up their right to basic education; we remain at it every year.

This is a truncated report of the last 20 years, as I outlined at the 2021 National Inclusive Education Summit.

As a testament to our efforts to date, 137 332 and 121 461 learners, compared to 64 000 and 77 000 in 2002, are enrolled in special and ordinary schools, respectively.

We have a dedicated capacity in all nine Provincial Education Departments (PEDs) to manage inclusive education guided by Basic Education experts based in Pretoria.

For instance, we have established District-Based Support Teams and School-Based Support Teams to coordinate inclusive education support services for teachers and learners.

As a collective, these professionals advance the ideal of inclusive education, share best practices and craft and monitor implementation plans for the sector.

To take inclusive education to the next level, in 2014, we finalised a *Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support Policy (SIAS)*.

The aim of the policy is to identify early signs of barriers to learning.

To date, 6 772 Grade Practitioners, 172 164 teachers and 10 010 officials have been oriented on the crux of the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support Policy.

Recently, the focus has shifted towards implementing the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support Policy throughout the sector.

For instance, during 2020/21, 22 074 Individual Support Plans (ISP) were developed to address learners' educational needs at the school level.

In terms of the policy, we had to convert and designate at least 500 public ordinary primary schools as full-service schools.

However, by the end of 2018, we had already designated 848 full-service schools, not just in 30 education districts required in White Paper 6, but in all education districts.

It is very rare in government work to say the following; as a sector, we exceeded the target of designating 500 schools as full-service ones by 348.

We had to designate or covert several special schools into resource centres in thirty designated districts per the directives of the White Paper.

I am happy to report that to date, 373 out of 435 special schools serve as resource centres, providing outreach services to full-service and ordinary schools.

To ensure excellent quality throughout the sector, we have developed *Standard Operating Procedures for the Designation, Conversion and Resourcing of Full-Service Schools* as per the Auditor-General's recommendations.

Programme Director, we have also turned the corner regarding access to education for Learners with Severe to Profound Intellectual Disability (LSPID).

As part of our work of ensuring access to education for Learners with Severe to Profound Intellectual Disability, 500 special care centres have been audited.

We have developed and field-tested the Learning Programme for this category of learners.

So far, 280 transversal itinerant team members have been trained to deliver the Learning Programme.

We have at least 3 423 learners with severe to profound intellectual disabilities who now utilise the Learning Programme and access therapeutic services.

Programme director, we have made great strides in diversifying curriculum offerings to cater to diverse educational needs.

We now offer South African Sign Language (SASL) as a matric subject.

For instance, 44 learners in eight of the 17 schools for the Deaf that offer Grade 12 wrote the first National Senior Certificate (NCS) examination in SASL Home Language in 2018.

In 2019, the number increased to 101 learners in 15 schools who wrote the National Senior Certificate examination.

For 2020, 140 candidates from five provinces, including Eastern Cape, Free State, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and Western Cape, wrote the National Senior Certificate examination.

Programme director on teacher provisioning and development for inclusive education is also picking up speed.

In 2020, 62 student teachers were funded through the Funza Lushaka Bursary to specialise in the South African Sign Language, Braille and neurodevelopmental needs.

We are also involved in the massive augmentative training scheme to prepare teachers as crucial agents of inclusive education.

Together with our partners, Unisa, British Council and MIET AFRICA, we launched the Teaching for All: Mainstreaming Inclusive Education in South Africa initiative.

The Teaching for All intervention aims to strengthen the capacity of pre-service and in-service teachers to recognise and respond effectively to the educational needs of children, thereby contributing to a more inclusive education system.

The programme is being piloted in Western Cape.

Meanwhile, we continuously offer specialised training to our teachers to meet the needs of specific disabilities such as Braille, South African Sign Language, Autism and other inclusive educational programmes.

Programme director, I am happy to report that 2 295 teachers have been trained in Braille, 2 714 in South African Sign Language, and 4 724 have received training on Autism.

We have also provided inclusive education training programmes to some 35 354 teachers.

In consultation with industry experts, the Independent Authority of South Africa (ICASA) and all relevant, inclusive education stakeholders, we have already developed a comprehensive ICTs Resource Model for Special Needs Schools.

Our overall implementation strategy includes:

- (1) ICT Guidelines for Schools;
- (2) Basic ICT package;
- (3) Assistive technologies basket;
- (4) Special Needs School Assessment form; and
- (5) Process Map.

It is pleasing to note that all Network Operators have, through the Universal Service and Access Obligations (USAO) project, committed to rolling out ICTs to all 447 Special Schools allocated to them with the fit-for-purpose ICT equipment.

This project began in 2019. It is now complete.

In our view, ICTs are a real game-changer, not just to narrow the proverbial 'digital divide' but 'to enable the disabled.'

Only ICTs can break the barriers of learners with disabilities by giving them a voice, independence and autonomy.

I am encouraged that our telecommunications giants (network operators) are again playing a more meaningful role in the social well-being of the poor, the marginalised and the disabled.

It's time, as a country, that we pulled together again.

South Africans deserve no less.

Programme Director, on 03rd March 2021, the Council of Education Ministers (CEM) meeting approved the review of Education White Paper 6.

Still, the CEM endorsed the recommendation of establishing a Task Team for this purpose.

This provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the implementation of the policy from its inception in July 2001.

Programme Director, we are working on a plan to ensure that this process gives us what we want.

Thus, be on the lookout for our invitation to participate in paving the way to an inclusive education and training system.

Programme Director, I want to conclude by pointing out that an inclusive, just, and fair society can only be achieved through collective and integrated action.

Inclusive education is not a one-person show; it comes about as a result of collaborative work and requires a 'we are in this together' attitude.

Let me take this opportunity to wish you well at your conference; it is crucial for the inclusive education sector.

I thank you.