

SPEECH BY LIMPOPO MEC FOR EDUCATION ISHMAEL KGETJEPE AT THE WATERBERG DISTRICT EDUCATION SUMMIT, 28 APRIL 2016, FOREVER RESORTS, BELA-BELA, LIMPOPO

Programme director

Executive Mayor

Mayors and councillors

Traditional Leaders

Our Acting Head of Department

Sponsors

Teacher unions

Our religious formations

School governing bodies

Business community

District management

Circuit managers

Principals of schools

Parents

Learner formations and representatives

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

A very good morning to all of you,

Programme director, today marks the fourth installment of our five district summit crusade after successfully hosting Sekhukhune, Vhembe last week and Capricorn just a couple of

days ago. We are hosting the Waterberg Summit a day after South Africans celebrated a very significant day in the history of our country, the Freedom Day. Freedom Day 2016 falls on the 40th anniversary of the historic June 16 1976, therefore it should inspire us all as a sector responsible for Education, together with our stakeholders to work towards a common objective of providing quality education.

As a result of a long, difficult and costly struggle for freedom, we are able to talk about the pro-poor policies that alleviate the plight of our learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. We currently have a lot of learners benefiting from National School Nutrition Programme, No Fee School Policy and Scholar Transport. These achievements in education by the ANC led government were also highlighted by the President in his Freedom day address in Giyani yesterday. It is in this regard that we must remind ourselves that the guarantee of these freedoms requires permanent vigilance. We must be vigilant by continuously reflecting and assessing whether these pro-poor policies are comprehensive enough to address issues of poverty and in the process improve learner performance.

The foundation has been laid for us to deal with the modern cruelties of poverty, unemployment and inequality. We must give in this Freedom Month recognition and thanks to all the veterans who fought against inequality and discrimination and to all those who believed so much in their cause that they laid their lives on the line.

Programme Director, South Africa is a Constitutional democracy and 22years into it; the constitutional principles of access, redress, equity remain very high on our sector's agenda. The

Basic Education sector is seized with the mammoth task of improving quality and efficiency in its education system. I am simply drawing your attention to all these so that we ensure that all people enjoy these freedoms not merely as theoretical rights but they must form the daily life experience of all South Africans served by our sector. Here in Waterberg, just like the other districts, our mission is to continuously work collaboratively to seek new strategies and interventions that will bring us closer to the desired quality state of our basic education in this district.

This summit aims to give space to a wide range of voices, to build, where possible, consensus, or at least better understanding on where we disagree and how to disagree and what the priority areas are which we collectively need to address. This is an opportunity to engage on the accelerated transformation of basic education. They say you can't solve a problem you are blind to. It is in this regard that we must first and foremost get our heads out of the sand and be realistic about the challenges facing education in the Waterberg District. Where there is a crisis, be it teacher supply, infrastructure, school governance, poor management, educator incompetence, curriculum delivery, support material and so on, we cannot be the last people to admit.

We say in Basic Education that education is a societal matter and simply says that we must dramatically improve and expand our collaborative volumes. This is what the summit must interrogate very sharply. We must be able to zoom into the current impediments that are peculiar to the Waterberg District to ensure that education occupies a special place in each and every community in this municipality.

The National Development Plan which is the country's socio-economic development blueprint, which is being implemented by government, outlines the type of society we want in 2030. The National Planning Commission which produced the NDP, has diagnosed that the quality of school education for black people is poor. It is also pointed out that infrastructure is poor, inadequate and under maintained. Having identified all these challenges, the NDP calls for different parts of the basic education sector to work together allowing learners to take different pathways that offer high quality learning opportunities.

It is fully incumbent on us to restore public confidence by reversing these challenges in our sector. If freedom in this country came about because of the solidarity, sacrifice and selfless support from freedom loving nations, quality education will also come about because of solidarity and friendship of many education loving communities.

In 2015 National Senior Certificate, performance declined in all the five districts with Waterberg and Sekhukhune districts registering performances that are below the national norm of 60%. Waterberg was number four in the province in 2014 with 70.5% and remained at the same position in 2015 but with a steep double figure decline of 12, 4% that amounted to a devastating 58.1%. We just have to check how many times Waterberg featured in the various performance categories when we were announcing the results in January, to understand how bad they performed in 2015.

This dismal performance prompted our Basic Education Minister to pledge her support and she has since visited the district on a fact finding mission. We hope your turnaround strategy that you

presented to the Minister during her visit will yield the desired results. This should be a matter of common cause among us and particularly the distinguished leaders of our communities and that there has to be serious improvement in learner performance in this part of our province.

Improving the quality of basic education and strengthening the foundation for teaching and learning is today a matter of common cause just like fighting against apartheid and protesting against an inferior education system of Bantu Education were. Such a performance raises questions of whether we are doing enough in terms of the protection of contact time between teachers and learners.

As we speak, this is one of the problems bedeviling our education system. The amount of contact that learners have with their educators as part of their learning experience is very important and contributes immensely to learner performance. This matter has been a concern for some time now and was even raised by our President, Jacob Zuma, in 2009 when addressing the nation. He said in that address: “ **Our teachers must commit to a set of non-negotiables i.e. to be in school on time, in class on time, teaching for at least seven hours, no abuse of learners and no neglect of duty**”. It has been seven years since the President of the Republic made the call for the protection of contact time but we seem not to be taking it seriously.

The decline also calls for our strengthening of school monitoring, management of schools and curriculum delivery. Equally important is to ensure that schools receive optimal support so that we detect early challenges that need attention and subsequent speedy resolutions.

We have since pronounced when delivering our budget vote recently on the Premier's directive of investing more on teacher development. The starting point should be subject specific interventions for teacher development programmes. To that end, we allocated as a start, a sizeable amount to build the capacity of our educators to cope with the ever-increasing demands of teaching. It is important for us to provide the right teacher in front of the right class teaching the right subject. We must do so knowing very well that the Premier did not revise the province's target of 80% in matric. That means more hard work on our part to ensure that we deliver on this directive.

Programme director, 2 272 learners in Waterberg District were progressed. We know that we did not do our part in assisting learners in consultation with their parents to sit for modularized examinations in 2015. This year, learners who are progressed must be assisted to make the right choices in consultation with parents to sit for modularized option examinations. School based assessment can assist in determining which learner is prepared to write which subject and which subjects can be shelved for another examination sitting. Assessments will point out which learners are coping and taking their studies seriously. We must be able to pick up warning signs after each assessment and what interventions to be administered.

We must bear in mind that failing is not an event that suddenly happens at the end of the semester or year. It happens over a period of weeks and months when learners neglect their work and we are not able to pick up such things in time. What happens at the end of the year is just a confirmation of what would have been

happening over a long period of time and we should have been able to arrest before it is too late.

We count on you, key stakeholders for a critical dialogue on ways of harnessing working relationships towards the improvement learner performance. We are certain that the presentation on improving learner performance will highlight a lot more and open our eyes to take responsibility to correct what needs to be corrected. Let us in the spirit of educating the other, talk about the broad challenges impeding learner performance and to open up a conversation about how some of these might be tackled, recognizing how this district performed particularly last year.

Programme director, we know that for effective teaching and learning to take place, we must work together with traditional leaders, business community and other relevant stakeholders to deal decisively with issues of protests that disrupt schooling and sometimes lead to vandalization of school property.

When delivering our budget vote recently, we made it very clear that the financial year 2016/17, even the following one, will not address the infrastructure backlogs faced by the Department. It might take longer than we expect to eradicate inappropriate school infrastructure. That is why from time to time we call on the business community to invest in the refurbishing and even building some of the school infrastructure more especially in communities where they ply their trade. We thank those partners like SAB and some of the mines in this district who have renovated our schools and provided sanitation.

As a Department, we made a commitment to refurbish existing structures and even fixing storm damage schools because creating an environment conducive to learning is our priority. We know that in this district, there is a huge shortage of classrooms and a number of schools damaged by storms.

Committed as we are to eradicating all inappropriate school infrastructures, we are not going to reward those communities that vent their frustrations on school property that has cost a lot of money to build. We want our learners to be in class on time to learn but which class will that be if the school property has been torched or vandalized.

Programme director, we also pointed out in the budget vote that we have delivered on time all the learning and support material before the schools reopened for 2016. It is important that each learner must have access to quality learning materials. This is something that we must strengthen moving forward so that teaching and learning must indeed take place on the first day of schooling. We are however concerned by those school managers who do not place orders when it is time to do so but cry foul that their schools have not received the material. Books must be allocated to learners accordingly and be retrieved at the end of the year.

We want to reiterate that those who made norms and standards allocation their playing ground must be warned that the money will be monitored on what it is spent on. There should be no school programme that suffers implementation because the money has been channeled somewhere else other than the intended purpose and objective. Any form of impropriety will not be tolerated.

Our people must realize that teaching and learning cannot take a centre stage if we continue to resist the programme of merging small schools which are not viable at all. On the 22nd of March this year, one of South Africa's newspapers broke a story on Mpepule Primary, a school which falls in this category. The question that came to mind was where was everyone when this school was allowed to operate in the manner it did. Where was the management, from school to district management? We all know how the Mpepule saga played itself out.

This district has identified about 77 schools that must be merged. We are in this regard calling upon communities to understand the logic behind the process of merging small and non-viable schools. Our reasons are noble and educational. The year 2015 also saw the number of underperforming schools increasing significantly in the province and this is a matter that we are challenging all of our districts to look at quite keenly and firmly. Waterberg district alone has 83 of such schools.

Programme director, parents are an important stakeholder in education and the Mpepule saga has shown us what some parents are capable of. Learners cannot be left in their own devices on matters of education. The Department of Education cannot be everything, it plays certain roles and other roles in the life of a learner must be played by others, more especially parents. Learners must enjoy the support of their parents and guardians. Parents' encouragement and support for learning activities at home, combined with parental involvement in schooling is very critical and can contribute immensely in the success of a learner. If we are to ensure that no pupil is left

behind, it is vital that parents know exactly how their children are doing at school and how they can support them to improve.

Equally important are progressive school governing bodies, which are not conflicted and serve their schools with commitment all the time. Some of these governing bodies remind us of what Martin Luther King Jnr once said: **“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy”** Certainly, there will be challenges from time to time, it is the nature of the sector. We must continue to work side by side in good and bad times and ensure that the interest of schools and its learners are always at the forefront.

Our schools will also flourish and be counted as the best when they are led by visionary and strong leaders. In schools, principals are the central figures and it must be understood that their actions will always have a direct impact on the success or failures of learners. That is why we have advertised posts of principals, deputy principals, and heads of department, because no school should be without a principal for longer than it is necessary. I must caution that we must as we appoint be careful who we appoint as the central figure of the school.

Programme director, it is our belief that working together we shall have schools that are characterized by learners and teachers who are highly motivated, principals who are effective managers providing administrative and curriculum leadership, schools that are accountable to parents, committed and professional teachers who have knowledge of subjects they teach.

To this end as I conclude, we expect the discussion during this summit to be as robust and frank as possible. It must not be just another talk shop and we call upon those who will be making presentations to provoke us with critical analysis which will enable commissions to engage robustly on topics. We must do so with respect, consideration and dignity.

We must strive to make education a societal issue and understands His Holiness, Dalai Lama's insightful words when he says: **"We must recognize that the suffering of one person or one nation is the suffering of humanity. That the happiness of one person or nation is the happiness of humanity"**

Together we move South Africa forward!

I thank you!