

Basic Education sector makes progress in implementing inclusive education

Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga says that much progress has been registered in fulfilling the Education White Paper 6 directives since it was introduced in 2001 but more effort is still required to leapfrog to the next level.

The Minister was speaking at an Inclusive Education Summit on Monday, jointly hosted by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities (DWYPD).

The objectives of the summit are to acknowledge the progress made and the gaps that still exist in the implementation of inclusive education.

The Minister said that government's commitment to inclusive education is derived from the Education White Paper 6 which calls upon it to provide quality education and support to all children with disabilities.

Motshekga said that the White Paper also directed the sector to mobilise out-of-school children and youth of school-going age to take up their right to basic education.

"I am happy to report that we did the advocacy work as required, assisted by a range of industry bodies and civil society organisations, for which we thank you. As a testament to our efforts to date, 137,332 and 121,461 learners, compared to 64,000 and 77,000 learners in 2002, are enrolled in special and ordinary schools, respectively," Motshekga said.

The Minister said that they have 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," she said.

Recently, the minister says the focus has shifted towards implementing Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support.

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

“We had to convert and designate at least 500 public ordinary primary schools as full-service schools in terms of the policy. However, by the end of 2018, we had already designated 848 full-service schools, not just in 30 education districts required in the 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,” the Minister said.

The sector had to designate or convert several special schools into resource centres in thirty designated districts as per the directives of the White Paper and to date 373 out of 435 special schools serve as resource centres, providing outreach services to full-service and ordinary schools.

Learners with Severe to Profound Intellectual Disability

A part of the sector’s work of ensuring access to education for Learners with Severe to Profound Intellectual Disability (LSPID), Minister Motshekga said that 500 special care centres have been audited.

She said that the department has 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,” Motshekga said.

Diversification of curriculum offerings

Minister Motshekga said that great strides have been made on the diversification of curriculum offerings to cater to diverse educational needs.

“We now offer the 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,” she said.

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

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

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

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

The sector has also provided inclusive education training programmes to some 35,354 teachers in the sector.