



KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY PREMIER DAVID MAKHURA ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING OF THE NOKUTHULA SCHOOL FOR LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS. CITY OF JOHANNESBURG.

17 October 2017

MEC for Education in Gauteng, MEC Panyaza Lesufi;
MEC for Infrastructure Development, MEC Jacob Mamabolo;
The principal, teachers and learners at this school;
Members of the School Governing Body;
Members of the community
Members of the Media
Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a great pleasure and tremendous sense of duty that I join you this morning in the official opening of Nokuthula, a new state-of-the-art school that caters for learners with special educational needs. In Gauteng, we have 120 schools that caters for learners with special needs so that no child is left behind in our journey to empower our nation.

It is fitting and proper that we open this school during a month that our nation celebrates the life of Oliver Tambo, one of the greatest South African freedom fighters and former a Mathematics and Physics Teacher at St Peters Secondary School in Rosettenville,

OR Tambo had the following to say about investing in the children and the youth:

“The children of any nation are its future. A country, a movement, a person that does not value its youth and children does not deserve its future”.

President Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo’s life-long friend, comrade and partner in their Law Firm, Mandela & Tambo, had the following to say about education:

“No country can really develop unless its citizens are educated. Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world”.

As the ANC-led Gauteng Provincial Government, we deeply share the values and vision of Oliver Tambo and Nelson Mandela. Education is the biggest investment

that any nation can ever make into its future. It is the most decisive act of development – both self-development and national development. It forms the backbone of our programme for transformation, modernisation and reindustrialisation of Gauteng. Indeed investing in quality public education is the most decisive and sustainable way through which we can empower our children and our youth.

We remain steely in our determination to build a quality public education system that benefits all, regardless of their circumstances. We are promoting inclusive education!

We want to say to learners with special needs. We love you. You too have a special place in our hearts. You too are very gifted young people whose full potential must be explored through inclusive education.

Professor Stephen Hawking, the wheelchair bound scientist who uses a sensor on his cheek to speak is one of the greatest and brightest physicists and cosmologist of this century has the following advice:

"We are different. There is no such a thing as a standard or run-of-the-mill human being, but we share the same human spirit...My advice to other people with disabilities would be, concentrate on things your disability doesn't prevent you doing well, and don't regret the things it interferes with. Don't be disable in spirit."

I want to add: do not be disabled in ambition, effort and intellect. You can be the best that God wanted you to be. You can be the best professional or scientist in the world. You must dream big. We are here to help you realise your dream and purpose in life.

By opening this state-of-the-art, green facility today we are making it possible for an additional 560 learners with special educational needs to access quality education and thus stand a better chance to participate fully in economic and social life.

In the past three years, we have enrolled 4000 learners across Gauteng. We are fully aware that the demand out there in our communities to accommodate more learners with special educational needs is huge. We need many more of such schools, if we are to succeed in making a significant dent in responding to the massive demand for special schools in our province.

Detecting learning difficulties or disabilities is one of the major challenges. As we build more schools for learners with special needs, we also need to expand the curriculum offering in these schools.

Accordingly, we are of the view that this mega school and many others like it will follow in the future and will help us respond to the demands from our communities. The Nokuthula School for Learners with Special Educational Needs represents a model and a new standard in the provisioning of special education into the future in Gauteng.

Ladies and Gentlemen, consistent with our goal of providing quality education to all learners in Gauteng, regardless of their educational requirements, we have thus far

refurbished 13 schools successfully converting them into proper special schools. Five more schools will be refurbished in due course.

We wish to take this opportunity to assure parents that in all our special schools we do have exit plans for our learners. In terms of these plans we are working with parents, the educators and the learners themselves to develop a post-school career path for individual learners taking into account their unique circumstances. Some of the learners can be accommodated within our flagship youth empowerment initiative; Tshepo 1 million through which we are breaking down barriers for young people to access decent employment, skills development and entrepreneurial opportunities.

The work we are doing to improve the quality of education offered to learners with special needs forms part of the specific interventions we are making to improve education outcomes in our province.

These interventions include harnessing ICT to provide smart schools and classrooms of the future, ensuring the universal access of Grade R, expanding the post-matric bursary scheme, establishing schools of specialisation and ensuring that the performance gap between learners from fee-paying and no-fee paying schools is narrowed.

Our successes as we implement these interventions include:

- The notable decline in the percentage of the Gauteng population aged 20 and above with no education, having improved from 4.5% in 2001 to 2.3% in 2015;
- The number of Gauteng learners passing matric has increased year-on-year, from 84 247 learners in 2014 to 88 381 learners in 2016;
- In 2016, Gauteng had the highest secondary school completion rates in South Africa at 59,9%, against the national average of 55,1% and the highest literacy rates at 96,4%;
- The performance gap between the no-fee schools and the fee-paying schools has narrowed significantly - from 27.2% in 2011 to 11.5% in 2016. Our goal of a 0% gap in performance between fee-paying and no-fee schools is within reach;
- Since 2014, more than 10 000 learners mainly from our no-fee schools have been allocated bursaries to further their studies at tertiary institutions. Thus far, we have invested more than R 800 million in bursaries for higher education. Our target is to reach R 1 billion by 2019;
- Gauteng has a 95% access to Grade R, making our goal of universal access to Grade R a distinct possibility;
- As a direct response to the skills requirements of our economy in 2016, we launched Curtis Nkondo School of Specialisation in Emndeneni Soweto. More such schools will be opened in all our development corridors. Our schools of specialisation will help us produce learners that are able to compete successfully not only with their counter-parts in other parts of the country, but most importantly with the best in the world. They will help us build future citizens that will compete globally.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish to use this occasion to say that we are very perturbed and angered by the sexual, harassment, abuse, molestation and rape of girl learners in our schools. I want to send a strong message to those involved that we are coming for them. We shall remove them from the education system and society by ensuring that they are prosecuted and sent to jail. They have hit us where it hurts most. They have touched us in our studio.

I want the Provincial Police Commissioner to focus on the crimes against our girl children. I want all SGBs to hold all principals accountable for what happens in their schools. I want MEC Lesufi and HOD Mosuwe to ensure that all teachers and staff involved must be fired! Let us join hands to make our schools safe for all our children, especially the girl learners.

In conclusion, I also wish to take this opportunity and wish all our matriculants all the best as they prepare to write their exams in the next few weeks. We trust that you will make us proud. We have no doubt that your hard work of over 12 years will finally pay off.

Thank you.

Issued by the Gauteng Provincial Government

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