

RE-OPENING OF SCHOOLS 2021

Speaker Notes

Monday, 15 February 2021

Principal and Educators;

Parents and School Community;

Most importantly, our learners

It is with great pleasure to formally welcome you all on the first day of the 2021 school academic year.

I hope you are well rested and full of energy to meaningfully contribute to further improve the quality of education.

We are gathered here today, under very unpredictable conditions, when the world and our country, as well as the entire basic education sector are confronted by a global pandemic. In the past few weeks, there has been a lot of criticism, an increase in anxiety and confusion in relation to the status of schooling, and questions on when learners will be allowed to go back to school. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the lives of many South Africans directly and indirectly.

The pandemic has also severely affected the basic education system and resulted in the loss of valuable schooling days.

The strategic focus by the Department of Education on Building the Elements of, Capacity for and Momentum Towards a Modern, Growing and Successful Education System in the Northern Cape, offers the Province with a unique set of strategic opportunities to redesign, re-align, reposition and project their joint capabilities in new ways.

This strategic focus will not simply seek to ensure greater administrative efficiency or bureaucratic streamlining, but to drive the schooling, curriculum, knowledge and skills development imperative more decisively, more effectively and with greater transformational impact in society.

We view all our schools as centres of excellence and we must adhere to high morals, discipline and respect. These values must be inculcated by parents and legal guardians at home, which is the first institution of learning.

If children and youth are our future, then education is the key to unlock that future. Without education, the future of any nation, community and person is likely to be bleak and uncertain. Education is the bridge that connects each person with their aspirations.

The ANC – LED Government has taken a decision to prioritize Education and make it a societal issue. This decision must be understood clearly by all of us.

FOR LEARNERS

This decision means you will be at school every day in terms of the differentiated timetable the school makes use of, doing your school work without fail. It means you will respect the rules of the school, your teachers and your peers.

FOR TEACHERS

This decision means there will be greater accountability expected about your work. It means you must be at work on time to teach. It also means you will uphold the integrity of the profession in the eyes of your community at all material times.

FOR THE SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT)

This decision means that they must focus their energies in building better teams and ensuring that teachers perform at their best and are supported in a structured way.

The SMT must ensure that the school performs in line with the priorities set out and they must also manage and monitor adherence to curriculum implementation.

ON GOVERNANCE

The term of office for the existing School Governing Body expires at the end of February 2021. The 9th SGB Elections are scheduled to take place from 1 March to 30 April 2021.

We are calling on our structures, councillors, ward committees, Church and Youth Leaders to start mobilising parents to support schools in the education of our

children. We are expecting a cordial working relationship between the SMTs and SGBs.

Stability in our schools is critical. For this to happen, we need men and women in the SGBs who will serve honestly and for the benefit of our children and communities.

SGBs are critical in ensuring that the school remain a safe haven for our children to learn.

SCHOOL SAFETY

During the past year, schools were confronted by numerous incidents of violence that occurred in and outside our school premises, especially during the National Lockdown. A total of 130 schools were vandalised during the National Lockdown and 31 schools during December- January school holiday break. This was a clear indication of sheer disregard for institutions of learning. These incidents compromised the safety of innocent learners and educators and has infringed on the right to education of those not involved.

The current situation in our schools has reached unacceptable levels and requires our collective responsibility to create a conducive environment for quality public education.

It is the responsibility of the school principal, school management team, educators, school governing body, Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign (QLTC) committee, parents and learners to cooperate and work with us in this regard.

We should always be mindful of the fact that education is a constitutional right for everyone and at no stage will we will tolerate the victimization of one learner by another.

Learners who are found in breach of the code of conduct policy will be subjected to a disciplinary process and expelled, if necessary. Incidents relating to violence have a negative impact on the quality of education.

Allow me to also issue a stern warning to educators who jeopardises the professionalism of the teaching profession.

Let me make it clear from the onset, we have no space for racism in our schools between fellow learners and/or between educators and learners.

The Department has taken a zero tolerance stance on the matter, and therefore I have assigned a task team to do a full scale investigation on these incidents.

We commend all educators who continue to give their utmost best to bring out excellence in our learners, sometimes under difficult circumstances.

NATIONAL TEACHERS AWARDS

We would like to encourage you to participate and nominate your best teachers for the annual National Teachers Awards that will take place on 5 October 2021, in Kimberley.

Sometimes, we should remind ourselves that teaching is more than imparting knowledge; it is about inspiring learners to change and explore the unknown.

You have the important role of shaping lives and nurturing the next generation of productive members of our society; you are in the forefront of transforming lives and of building our nation. You have the difficult role of inspiring the young people around you to want to be a better person tomorrow.

These learners look up to you as their role models, and in some sense you act as surrogate mothers and fathers in their lives, so treat them as you would your own children. We value and appreciate the role of Educators in the classroom.

LOVE YOUR SCHOOL CAMPAIGN

The Northern Cape Provincial Government launched the Love Your School Campaign on the 24th of January 2020, which will strengthen the community involvement and participation in the environment of their education.

The Campaign seeks to improve the management and maintenance of sanitation facilities in schools and further increasing awareness of good sanitation and hygiene practices.

The Love Your School Campaign will take the schools sanitation programmes into the next phase because it will also focus on educating school staff and cleaners on how to keep their school environment clean on an ongoing basis as they continue to practice good hygiene habits. A school represents a beacon of hope in every community, where we prepare learners for success.

As I conclude, to all our learners: It is not enough to just pass; you need to pass very well in order to increase your chances for further training. You can succeed despite difficult circumstances, poor backgrounds and humble beginnings.

Through sheer hard work, commitment and determination nothing can prevent you from achieving your full potential and your dreams.

We wish all educators and learners well with the 2021 school academic as we will raise the bar of Education in the Northern Cape. Remember to ALWAYS wear your mask, maintain social distance and sanitize or wash your hands regularly.

I thank you!