

Statement By The Minister Of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, MP on the progress of the review of the National Curriculum Statement, Tuesday 06 July 2010

Curriculum

I am pleased to use this opportunity to brief and update you on the steps we have taken in 2010 to act on the recommendations of the Ministerial Committee that was tasked with the review of the implementation of the National Curriculum Statement in 2009. It is vital that South Africans are kept abreast of the progress that the Curriculum Review process is making in order that all education stakeholders can take ownership of the process. Public consultation is vital and we stand firm on the principle that the process is open and transparent.

Curriculum reform is not something that the system takes lightly. My message from the onset of the Curriculum review process has been that we need to work against change fatigue in order to build confidence and enthusiasm amongst all our stakeholders. Therefore we are proceeding deliberately and decisively to effect the broad recommendations of the Ministerial Committee.

At the same time, we need to deal quickly and efficiently with curriculum implementation challenges and difficulties that do exist. We have already started the process of identifying problems and have taken the necessary steps to find solutions. We have and will continue to make changes on an on-going basis where they can be made with minimal disruption.

Short-term, immediate changes with long-term implications

The Review Committee confirmed that teachers experience curriculum and administrative overload. We have taken steps to provide short-term relief on these matters. We have reduced the number of projects for learners, and have done away with the need for portfolio files of learner assessments. We have also discontinued the Common Tasks for Assessment (CTAs) for Grade 9 learners with effect from January 2010. Provinces have already informed their schools about the form of assessment that will replace CTAs in 2010.

Medium-term curriculum change

Earlier this year, I established three Committees of highly respected experts led by three able people, with the requisite experience and qualifications, to enable the smooth implementation of the main recommendations of the 2009 Curriculum Implementation Review Committee.

The main Committee is ensuring that the National Curriculum Statement is repackaged so that it is more accessible to teachers. Every subject in each grade will have a single, comprehensive and concise Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement that will provide details on what teachers ought to teach and assess on a grade-by-grade and subject-by-subject basis.

Currently the design features of the National Curriculum Statement learning areas comprise of outcomes and assessment standards. Assessment requirements are mapped onto the achievement of outcomes and assessment standards. The new Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements will repackage the existing curriculum into the general aims of the South African curriculum, the specific aims of each subject, clearly delineated topics to be covered per term and the required number and type of assessments, also per term.

In this way, outcomes will be absorbed into more accessible aims, and content and assessment requirements will be spelt out more clearly. Topics and assessments to be covered per term are being aligned to available time allocations per subject.

The Council of Education Ministers' meeting that met on the 29th June to consider these and other curriculum matters agreed to call all learning areas and programmes SUBJECTS. From 2011, learning areas and programmes will be called subjects across the curriculum from Grade R-12.

Council has further taken on board the recommendations of the Review Committee to reduce the number of learning areas in the Intermediate Phase from eight to six. That means that in grades 4 to 6 technology will be combined with science, arts and culture will be combined with life orientation and economic and management sciences will be taught only from grade 7. A committee I established has investigated the implementation implications and confirmed that this can be done without destabilising the system and is indeed in the interests of teaching and learning.

Mindful of the need for teacher orientation and development of appropriate textbooks and learning and teaching support materials, we will start phasing in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements in the Foundation Phase in 2011. We will phase in other grades in 2012 so that we can make the necessary preparations.

Workbooks

One of the key priorities that I set in my Budget vote speech in March this year in order to achieve our education targets is the development and distribution of adequate learning and teaching materials particularly to those schools we have identified as part of a broader strategy of improving the learning and teaching of these critical foundational skills. A crucial pillar in the Department's determination to improve learner performance is the provision of learner workbooks. This project is a result of the injunction by the Presidency to provide resources to teachers and learners to improve learner performance in literacy and numeracy.

To this end, the Department of Basic Education has developed **a plan for the development of the Workbooks for Grades 1 – 6** in order to ensure the development, piloting, printing and distribution of learner workbooks early in 2011. We will pilot the workbooks in schools in 2010 and they will be available for use in all schools in 2011. The project will provide resource support to 6.5 million learners and approx 180 000 teachers in nearly 20 000 schools. This will place workbooks in the hands of each and every learner in the system.

The development of the workbooks will be done internally in the Department. The Department will utilize capacity within the system including the Department of Basic Education and Provincial Departments of Education. A team of curriculum experts/materials developers/translators is developing the workbooks. These individuals have proven experience in the development of learner workbooks, are conversant with resource based methods and are able to produce high quality output according to project deadlines.

The 2009 Curriculum Implementation Review Committee had recommended the increased and improved use of textbooks, a national catalogue of learning and teaching support materials and greater efficiency in the pricing and procurement of textbooks and learning and teaching support materials. The third Committee I established earlier this year has provided guidance on the procedures by which this can most effectively be achieved. This has been done in consultation with key stakeholders.

Additional recommendations that Council approved include the following:

Firstly, the Council approved the recommendation that from 2011, the language chosen by the learner as a Language of Learning and Teaching shall be taught as a subject, or as a First Additional Language, from Grade One (1) and not from Grade 2, as is currently the case. What this means, for instance, is that the teaching of English will occur alongside mother tongue instruction for those learners who choose English as a language of learning and teaching. English will not replace the mother tongue or home language in the early grades, as some commentators have interpreted the recommendation.

Secondly, Council agreed to regular, externally-set assessments at grades 3, 6 and 9 in literacy (in home language and first additional language) and numeracy/mathematics. It agreed on a weighting of continuous assessment and end of year examinations as follows: Grades R-3: 100% continuous assessment; Grades 4-6: 75% continuous assessment: 25% end of year exam; Grades 7-9: 40%: continuous assessment:

60% end of year exam and Grades 10-12: 25% continuous assessment : 75% end of year exam.

Council thirdly agreed that the symbols or rating scales used to rate learner performance in Grades 10-12 will, from 2011, be extended to Grades R-9, so that there is consistency across the curriculum.

Council will consider the recommendations of the National Teacher Development Stakeholder process soon so that we can act to provide the necessary support.

Finally, all policy-related matters arising from the decisions of the Council of Education Ministers will be put out for formal consultation as per our normal statutory and non-statutory procedures. Since some of the changes have policy implications, we will, in keeping with due process, publish and invite public comment on the decisions taken by the Council of Education Ministers.

Effective communication of all these changes is critical. In addition to our official and formal notification, we have begun a curriculum newsletter and distributed the first one to all teachers and officials in time for the beginning of the school year in 2010. *Curriculum News* will be produced quarterly. Its purpose is to ensure that all teachers and officials are kept abreast of changes and what to expect in the future.

Finally, all the above will allow us to address key challenges with regard to curriculum implementation. However, our overarching priority is to bring about a fundamental change in schooling outcomes. To this end I will shortly be unveiling a comprehensive turnaround plan for the schooling sector. This plan is branded: Action Plan 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025.

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