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EDUCATION BUDGET VOTE – WEDNESDAY 24 MARCH 2010, 19h00, PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURE, CAPE TOWN

Budget Vote of Western Cape Minister of Education, Donald Grant

Mr Speaker
Honourable Premier
Fellow Members of the Executive Council
Honourable Members of the Provincial Legislature
The Superintendent General of Education and all senior officials from the Western Cape Education Department
Invited guests from the education community
Ladies and Gentlemen

Mr Speaker, thank you for giving me the opportunity to present the 2010/11 Budget for education in the Western Cape.

Investment in quality public education is arguably the best investment any government can make.

That is why I am especially pleased that this administration has made education one of its top priorities and that it will receive an allocation of R32.8 billion over the Medium Term Expenditure Framework.

This budget is fully aligned to our overarching goal of providing quality education to all the learners of the Western Cape, which is the cornerstone of our vision of an open opportunity society for all.

The provision of a quality education is fundamental in ensuring that no young people have their path in life determined by the circumstances of their birth, including both their material and demographic circumstances, but that their future is determined rather by their talents and their efforts.

That is why in an opportunity society, a child born in poverty should nonetheless be able to become a doctor, engineer or, most importantly, a teacher.

To this end, as will be detailed throughout my address today, this administration is putting the majority of its resources into ensuring that schools in our poorer communities are radically improved

Schools cannot simply continue to replicate the circumstances of the communities they find themselves in; they must rise above these circumstances and instead become oases of opportunity, so that all learners are given every chance to become full and productive citizens.

Our goal of providing a quality education to all learners in this province can only be achieved if we improve learner outcomes in every school in the province.

In November last year we set ourselves a range of targets to improve literacy and numeracy competency at Grades 3, 6 and 9, as well as, targets to improve the Grade 12 pass rate.

We have done so to illustrate just how serious our commitment is to provide quality education in this province.

I will today outline the key steps we are taking to achieve our objective of improving learner outcomes.

Putting the learner first

Speaker,

In order to provide a quality education to the almost one million learners in the Western Cape, we have had to make a number of changes.

We inherited an education system that was functioning at far from optimum levels.

The Grade 12 pass rate had consistently declined over the last 5 years, the number of underperforming schools had tripled and the department was often involved in costly and unnecessary litigation.

This was compounded by an all too often uncaring and unresponsive approach to dealing with the legitimate concerns of schools and other role-players in education.

The net result of this was that the interests of learners often came a distant third, behind misplaced racial and ideological considerations and the narrow rights of educators.

The absence of quality leadership in this regard was glaring.

In stark contrast, this administration has taken a number of practical and proactive steps to correct this imbalance and to put the rights of learner's first.

We have installed a new HOD, who along with the Head Office Managers and the District Directors, has already made great strides in ensuring that resources, both human and capital, have been directed where they are most needed - in the classroom, especially in schools that have consistently underperformed.

For instance, the management of independent schools has been moved to Head Office, reducing the load on district officials and allowing them to direct their attention to schools that are in need of remedial action.

Furthermore, the 167 schools who achieved a 90% pass rate will receive assistance only if and when they need it.

This 'you call us approach' is in line with our principle of leaving those schools who perform well alone, and allows us instead to focus the majority of our resources on those schools that desperately need proper and sustained remedial action and support.

These are just two examples of how we have shifted our focus.

Essentially, in all that we do, in every policy decision we make, the right of learners to a quality education is at the forefront of our agenda.

The Budget

This brings me to the 2010/11 budget, which reflects our overriding objective of creating a system that delivers a quality education for all learners in the province.

Quality teaching:

Given that a quality education depends primarily on the quality of teaching offered, our educators are the most important asset we have.

They are also the largest cost driver within the department.

Just over 80% of this budget is spent on personnel, both educator and support posts.

We have therefore tried to ensure that we limit the number of administrative posts and maximise the number of teaching posts.

We have for example, created an additional 134 teaching posts on top of the total teacher allocation, by placing personnel from head office and the districts in teaching posts, largely in our primary schools.

This will help reduce the learner-teacher ratio in some of our more overcrowded schools, as well as, provide much needed support and relief in the critically important foundation phase of education.

In order to improve learner outcomes it is imperative that teachers are able to properly convey their subject to their learners; therefore, we will focus on improving teacher skills and increasing levels of job satisfaction.

We have fundamentally overhauled teacher development by applying the principles of fit for purpose in practice.

Instead of generic training workshops, each session will be designed and tailored to suit and target individual teacher needs.

For teachers in underperforming schools, compulsory specialized training will be provided with a special emphasis on on-site training.

In previous years, teachers have been taken out of the classroom to participate in training sessions during teaching time.

This practice is already a thing of the past.

Teachers and principals will not normally be taken out of the classroom, and instead will receive training outside of school hours.

Training will also no longer be compulsory for teachers at those schools who perform well. Instead they will be offered targeted training that will genuinely focus on and enhance their professional development.

We are also determined to ensure that our teachers are happy in their jobs, and that they are afforded the time and space to fulfill their passion - which is delivering a quality curriculum to their learners.

To this end, we have reduced the administrative and curriculum workload on teachers.

Teachers are valued professionals, and need to be treated as such.

Therefore, in line with existing agreements, 3000 senior teachers in various grades will soon receive a laptop, funded from our national budget allocation.

This will help with their administrative workload and organization and allow them to further enhance

their ability to teach a quality curriculum. This is an example of constructive interaction between the teacher unions and the employer nationally and provincially - an interaction that is also to the benefit of learners.

We have also reduced other distractions to an absolute minimum.

We have to ensure that all teachers and learners are in the classroom for 7 hours a day, 200 days a year.

Any time spent on other activities limits the opportunity for learning and is a major contributing factor to poor learner outcomes.

I am pleased that the Premier has helped drive the message that this administration is extremely serious about ensuring time on task.

The message is slowly getting through, but I would like to appeal to everyone involved in education to make sure that interventions, and offers of assistance, do not undermine our principle of keeping our focus on learning activities.

There are a number of praiseworthy initiatives that we welcome and that add value in our schools. We ask only that they take place outside school hours, on the weekend or in school holidays.

Textbooks:

Speaker,

Quality teaching can only take place in a text-rich environment. This administration is firmly of the belief that textbooks are an essential educational resource for the development of reading, writing and language skills.

Providing textbooks to our learners is a non-negotiable, as the availability of quality texts militates against poor teaching and allow learners systematically to grasp the curriculum material.

That is why, over the next financial year, we will spend an extra R100 million on providing texts to schools. This spending is in addition to the norms and standards allocation to schools and will target the foundation phase or Grades 1 to 3.

We have also recently concluded a top-up programme, which saw 15 000 additional textbooks being provided to Grade 12 learners in critical subject areas.

The additional R100 million allocation to textbooks has been funded, in part, by embarking on a number of cost savings initiatives.

This administration believes that there is simply no contest between spending public money on business class flights versus the buying of textbooks.

Thus, in a marked departure from past practice, we have saved R16 million by simply cutting out business class flights and other unnecessary travel expenditure, launches, gifts, parties and other unnecessary expenditure.

There is still more work to be done in this regard and all our officials are ensuring that we do not waste a single cent on frivolous expenditure over the coming years.

Unlike previous administrations, the Ministry has not held a budget party this year and has dramatically cut back on any other non-productive expenditure. This is the example I know the rest of the department will follow.

I have to add, given that it is library week, that I am proud of the fact that the WCED has invested heavily in establishing libraries in the poorest schools in the province over the past three years. This investment has seen, amongst other things, 325 000 books being provided to schools.

While we share the ultimate objective of providing school libraries to all schools, we have to ensure, in the context of resource constraints, that we also prioritise creating text-rich classroom environments.

Through simple cutbacks and the re-direction of resources, we can make text-rich classrooms possible.

We will not rest until every learner, no matter what school they find themselves in, has the text required to succeed.

Testing:

Providing the necessary teaching materials is only one half the equation.

We need to know where our learners' strengths and weaknesses lie.

If we do not set benchmarks for our learners and test them against these benchmarks on a regular basis, we will never be able to target individual learning needs and improve learner outcomes. We will therefore spend R30 million this year on testing.

As a result of a number of years of targeted planning and support, our recent Grade 6 literacy and numeracy assessment results revealed that we are making inroads into improving learner outcomes, in these two critical areas of learning.

The gap between those who can and those who cannot comprehend literacy and numeracy at the lower grade levels is closing.

Put simply, the number of children who are achieving at grade 4 and 5 level is increasing.

This is evidenced by the fact that in 2003, only 29.1% passed at grade 4 level, whilst in 2009, 45.1% passed at that same level.

This is an encouraging 16% increase.

Yesterday, I visited Rustenberg Girls' Junior School in Rondebosch and Yomelela Primary in Khayelitsha to congratulate them on their 2009 Grade 6 literacy and numeracy

Rustenberg Girls' Junior School have consistently excelled over the last three years and obtained a 100% pass rate in literacy and 95.9% in numeracy.

Yomelela Primary is one of our most improved primary schools, with an increase in their literacy pass rate from 0% in 2005 to 43.7% in 2009. Their numeracy results improved also from 0% in 2005 to 38.9% in 2009.

Yomelela's example, in particular, illustrates that with consistent testing and the appropriate interventions we can together ensure that this province's levels of literacy and numeracy reach the levels we aspire to.

Grade 12 plan:

While much of our focus is on improving learner outcomes at lower grades, we are also fully committed to improving the top end of the system.

One of the more important aspects of improving learner outcomes is our Grade 12 turnaround plan.

This plan is critical to the future of our young people, for their very life chances are at stake.

In order to help more learners pass Grade 12 we are for the first time spending significantly on learner support packs, winter schools, tutors, and mentor principals - an amount of R10 million in fact.

These are innovative interventions which have never been fully implemented before.

Practical steps such as using experts in their respective fields to teach complex sections of the syllabus, particularly at underperforming high schools, are precisely the kind of hands-on interventions which will make a real difference, where it matters most - in the classroom.

I cannot emphasize enough how we need to treat the class of 2010 as the most important people in the province. More important than soccer players or Zakumi!

They are the superstars of our future, and I encourage all of the citizens of the Western Cape collectively to ensure that they are kept motivated, prepared and supported until they write their National Senior Certificate Examinations later this year.

We must not forget that while the World Cup lasts for only five weeks, the futures of our learners will be determined by the education that they receive now, and way beyond, the 2010 World Cup.

Infrastructure:

We can invest as much as we like in improving learner outcomes through teacher development, textbooks and testing, but if our teachers and learners do not feel safe, secure, warm and nourished, these investments are likely to come to naught.

We cannot expect a learner and a teacher to be happy and improve their outcomes if the classroom they are expected to learn and teach in is overcrowded or in a poor condition.

Therefore, I am proud to announce today that we will be allocating over the MTEF, R1.3 billion to improve the quality of our school infrastructure dramatically.

This amount will pay for the 4 schools currently under construction, 6 schools currently out on tender, 25 new schools, 20 replacement schools, 350 new classrooms, 100 new Grade R classrooms and the provision of mobile classrooms.

This is an ambitious plan, which is a marked departure from the past, where new schools were built on an ad-hoc and often politically motivated basis.

Instead, we have used careful analysis and research to determine where new schools are most needed, where infrastructure is at its oldest and in need of replacement, and where overcrowding is most severe.

The 25 new schools which are to be built over the next 3 years will play a significant role in helping to improve the quality of education offered to our learners.

We will be specifically targeting poorer communities who, as a result of historical neglect, often have had to contend with schools that are in an awful condition.

This is especially true of the 20 replacement schools, which will see the worst of the so-called 'plankieskole' being fully replaced.

I am particularly excited about the plan to build an additional 350 classrooms.

These classrooms will serve two purposes - firstly, to expand access to our more successful schools, and secondly, to alleviate overcrowding.

These schools will be given the funds to construct between 3-5 new classrooms. This programme will be entirely voluntary and I am heartened by the positive response it has received so far. SGBs will be fully consulted and involved.

The participating schools will now be able to accept more children, instead of every year having to turn away hundreds of disappointed learners as they are currently forced to do.

The second purpose will be to alleviate overcrowding, especially in Grade 1.

It is pointless to make substantial investments in a Grade R programme, only to have a learner placed, the following year, in an overcrowded Grade 1 classroom where quality learning cannot take place.

Therefore, 1 or 2 classrooms will be built at identified schools in order to reduce learner-teacher ratios at the Grade 1 level.

I hope that our classroom plan will be further embraced across the province, as I believe; it is truly a win-win situation for all concerned.

We do also recognize that some of our schools are in desperate need of maintenance, be it leaking roofs or proper sanitation and we will therefore spend over R330 million on maintenance in the next three years.

School safety:

While our infrastructure and maintenance allocations will contribute significantly to improving learning outcomes through the creation of a safe and decent learning environment, we also need to ensure that our learners are not scared or hungry.

This administration has a zero-tolerance approach to any form of violence in our schools, and we have taken a number of proactive steps to ensure that our learners are secure once they are behind the school gate.

In 2010/2011 we will spend R22 million on the safe schools programme.

This allocation will contribute towards improved physical security measures, such as metal detectors, fences, alarms and safety gates, as well as the implementation of behavioural and attitudinal programmes in our schools.

We will also increase the number of search and seizure operations conducted by the SAPS in a bid to make our schools weapons and drug free zones.

These operations were initiated through an interaction between my office and the SAPS, and I am confident that our zero-tolerance message is starting to get through to would be offenders.

Any incident of violence, is one too many, and I want to reassure members of the Western Cape education community that I will stop at nothing to ensure that our schools are made secure environments in which to learn.

This will, however, only be achieved through a collective effort. The education department cannot be solely responsible for the protection of learners beyond the school gate. We need the assistance of the SAPS and the broader community to ensure their safety once they leave the relative safety of their schools.

We know that there are many challenges in this regard. This was highlighted last week by the senseless and seemingly gang related murder of Ntsikelelo Mangolothi, a Grade 10 learner outside Masibambisane High School in Delft.

So while we strive to improve learning outcomes in the curriculum, we are also determined to teach our learners a very valuable lesson in life - violence does not resolve conflict.

School feeding:

Speaker,

No child can learn if he or she is hungry. While it is primarily the responsibility of a learner's guardians to ensure that his or her basic needs are met, the reality is that many parents lack the means to do so.

This places an obligation on schools to, where necessary, make it easier for children to learn by giving them a nutritious meal.

Therefore, in order to ensure that we have no hungry children in our schools, our school nutrition programme will receive R174 million this year and will help feed 345 000 learners, every school day.

We will place special emphasis on using this money to try and provide more nutritious meals to young, exceptionally poor and vulnerable learners.

Special needs education:

An essential part of our vision of an open, opportunity society for all is allowing greater access to educational opportunities for children with special needs.

The Western Cape already leads the country in the provision of special needs education. Our commitment to these learners is reflected in the R688 million allocation to this programme in 2011, representing a 17% increase.

It must be recognised that each of our six Special Education Needs (LSEN) schools in the Province achieved a 100% pass rate in the 2009 NSC examinations.

These learners represent the open opportunity society in action, and I would like again to congratulate the LSEN class of 2009.

No-fee schools:

We also remain conscious of the current tough economic climate.

To assist parents in financial need we have increased the percentage of learners in no-fee schools from 38% to 40%.

This is an increase of 23 schools, bringing the total of no-fee schools in the Western Cape to 676.

The additional expenditure on the approximately 14 600 learners will be R5.2 million.

We are at the same time very aware of the serious shortcomings on the current model of school funding and that many schools are encountering significant challenges. This aspect is receiving urgent attention.

Amendment Bill:

While all these allocations contribute financially towards a quality education system, for our objective of improving learner outcomes to be achieved, the application of these resources must take place within a sound, up to date, legislative and policy framework.

The existing Western Cape Provincial Schools' Education Act dates back to December 1997 and has remained unrevised despite 8 extensive Amendment Acts at national level and despite significant changes to the context within which education is provided.

Early in my term of office I initiated, with the support of Cabinet, the necessary legislative review aimed at:

1. updating the Western Cape Act in line with national changes
2. giving effect to this administration's commitment to improved quality outcomes, accountability and appropriate monitoring

For example, whereas the existing WC Schools' Act has always provided for the Head of Department to authorize school inspection, the draft bill makes it clear that such inspection will be for the purposes of:

- the evaluation of performance in accordance with national and provincial norms and standards
- the monitoring of compliance with national and provincial norms and standards.

The resultant draft bill has been published for comment in all 3 official languages of the Western Cape, with a closing date for submissions of 16 April.

Thereafter the WCED will embark on a process of consultation with major role-players before finalizing the bill for formal consideration by this house, amongst others.

Once the Legislature - after what I know will be a rigorous process of interrogation - has approved the bill, the necessary policies and measures required to complete the framework for a quality stable, caring and disciplined school system will be updated or developed.

Conclusion:

There is no doubt that we have an enormous task ahead of us.

If we are to fulfill our vision of an open, opportunity society for all we simply have to ensure that all our learners are given access to a quality education.

It is with this overriding objective in mind that we have aligned this budget and our strategic priorities.

Through adopting the measures I have outlined today, we believe we are on the right track.

We encourage learners, teachers, principals and parents to embrace this vision and collectively to help ensure that we improve the quality of education provided in the Western Cape.

With that, Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to thank the Superintendent-General and all staff of the WCED - for all their hard work in the face of huge challenges ahead.

Together we can improve learner outcomes and ensure that our vision of an open opportunity society is alive in the Western Cape!

Thank you.

Issued by:
Bronagh Casey

Spokesperson for the Minister of Education, Donald Grant
Western Cape
Tel: 021 467 2377
Fax: 021 425 5689

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