

SECTION 5

ASSESSMENT OF THE PERIOD UNDER REVIEW AND CONCLUSIONS

The areas that have been reported on in this report regarding the performance of provincial departments of education and provision of education are of interest to government and the public. Aspects that have been reviewed fall broadly in three categories, namely:

- the preparedness of provincial departments of education and their respective schools to receive learners during the opening of schools at the beginning of the 2002 school year;
- an assessment of the extent to which provincial departments of education utilise available financial resources to support various activities; and
- an assessment of the human resource capacity of the provincial departments of education to perform their responsibilities.

The following conclusions and general assessment of the performance of provincial departments of education can be drawn from the report.

OPENING OF SCHOOLS AT THE BEGINNING OF A YEAR

On the preparedness of provincial departments and their respective schools to receive learners at the beginning of the year there are improvements compared to previous years. There are at least three areas that still need attention.

Firstly, while there has been an improvement with regard to the number of learners that are registered during the year preceding that of the opening of schools, provincial departments of education have still to pay more attention to their strategies of communication with school management teams, parents and learners about the importance of ensuring that learners are registered on time as required. Much time gets wasted when learners have to be registered on the day that schools open. This reduces the time that could have been spent either for learning and teaching purposes or for the orientation of learners to face the school year with confidence and enthusiasm.

Secondly, many school governing bodies have as yet to realise the importance of a school environment that is welcoming to both learners and educators, and is conducive to learning and teaching. The improvement of the condition of school buildings, the

improvement of sanitation and provision of adequate toilet facilities, the appearance of school grounds, and the availability of sporting facilities all fall within the responsibilities of school governing bodies. The observations made in the report about schools that had tall grass on the day of opening is one indication of the neglect of responsibilities on the part of school governing bodies. Provincial departments of education have to ensure firstly, that school governing bodies are trained to understand their responsibilities and are also encouraged to perform them, and secondly, that provincial departments of education and school governing bodies embrace the spirit of Vuk'uzenzele. They should arise and act in partnership with the communities served by the schools to provide school environments that are conducive to proper learning and teaching.

Thirdly, the provincial budget allocations for the procurement and distribution of learning support materials have improved. However, the procurement of the learning support materials and the distribution to schools has not improved as would have been expected after three years of focused attention. There are clearly still some weaknesses in the learning support materials' procurement and distribution systems used in most provinces. The report has demonstrated that not one province reported 100% delivery of learning support materials to schools before the first day of the commencement of the school year. Some of the reasons, for example, the fact that texts are out of print are understandable. Delays that are caused by either provincial departments making late submissions to Tender Boards or delays that are caused by Tender Boards not considering the submissions on time are not acceptable. This is not the responsibility of provincial departments alone but also of provincial treasuries. The Department of Education will continue to monitor and to advise on improvements in these areas of weakness in the spirit of cooperative governance.

UTILISATION OF FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The report has shown that in the financial year 2000/2001 five provincial departments of education had an under expenditure in their line budgets. The situation for the 2001/2002 has been worse than the previous year in that all provincial departments, except Western Cape, have shown an under expenditure in their line budgets albeit at different levels. Three provinces, Eastern Cape, Free State and Gauteng, have underspent by as much as 3% of their budgets which is outside the allowed 2% margin of over or under spending. The under expenditure has been demonstrated also in the utilisation of conditional grants. There has been no indication in the provincial reports of what the expenditure of donor funds has been during the 2001/2002 financial year.

Provincial departments of education have been encouraged to ensure that they appoint

Chief Financial Officers who would monitor and advise departments on the utilisation of departmental allocations. The delay on the part of provincial departments in appointing these officials may have been one reason for the under expenditure, which would be indicative of lack of capacity in skilled officials to manage and administer the budgets. In addition to this there may still be under expenditure due to delays associated with the process of procuring goods and services and an absence of financial management systems. All of the reasons cited above may be removed and the situation improved as Chief Financial Officers are appointed in all the provinces.

The request from the Minister of Education for provincial departments to develop and submit business plans for school infrastructure improvements should have served as an indication of what the government's priority for the current medium-term expenditure period regarding the provision of education. In addition the President announced in his speech during the opening of Parliament that government will make financial resources available to ensure that no child studies under a tree. However the slow response of some of the provincial departments of education has indicated one of two possibilities, either there is a lack of capacity to develop the required plans or the provincial departments do not regard the request as government's priority. This issue together with the challenges with spending financial resources will receive the attention of the Council of Education Ministers to ensure that all provincial departments align their priorities with government's priorities and delivery of services is improved.

HUMAN RESOURCE CAPACITY OF PROVINCIAL DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION

There are three levels described in the report with regard to the human resource capacity required to manage the provision of education. The three levels are at the provincial head office, at district offices and at schools. The reports were disappointing in their treatment of the subject particularly with respect to the filling of posts at head office and at school level.

Only three provinces, Free State, Mpumalanga and Western Cape, recognised that there are public service and educator positions at Head office and at Regional or District and then reported accordingly. The reports also failed to indicate the percentage vacancies according to post levels. The delay in two provincial departments, Eastern Cape and Western Cape, with respect to the filling of the post of the Head of Education in the respective provinces has been highlighted in this report but this had not been indicated in the provincial reports.

Provincial reports did not give a convincing picture with respect to the school principal

positions. All of this is due to the poor reporting on the part of provincial departments of education. Only Gauteng and Mpumalanga reported well in this regard.

CONCLUSION

Despite the challenges that have been highlighted in this report, there has been an improvement in the provision of education during the 2001/2002 financial year. Schools start on time and attendance by both learners and educators has improved despite the weaknesses that have been indicated. The management and administration of financial resources has improved and should continue to improve as weaknesses discussed above are addressed. All the challenges referred to can be addressed if provincial departments ensure that the necessary human resource capacity and skills are improved.

