basic education

Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Address at Umalusi Hand-out Ceremony of Braille Transcripts

by

Mrs Angie Motshekga, Minister of Basic Education

Filadelfia School, Soshanguve: 08 October 2013

Umalusi CEO, Dr Mafu Rakometsi

Parents and the community of Soshanguve

Principal and Staff of Filadelfia

Representatives of the SA National Council for the Blind

Representatives of Disabled Peoples' Organisations

Officials, ladies and gentlemen

For me it's a singular honour to recognise with thanks our main guests of honour without whose hard-work this occasion would not have been possible.

These are the 2012 matriculants who are receiving their certificates in Braille today. Thank you so much to each and every one of you for making your country and all of us proud.

Indeed this occasion marks a milestone for learners with visual impairment in South Africa. This initiative by Umalusi, the Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training, is a momentous step towards recognising the right to equal educational opportunities for learners with visual impairment.

In the past, learners with visual impairment only received printed certificates. They depended on other people to read and interpret for them their certificates. So this is a milestone precisely because it affords our children here the freedom to interpret matric results for which they have toiled so hard.

Quality education and support for learners with visual impairment is our key priority. We have declared 2013 the Year of Inclusive Education. Umalusi's marvellous work is therefore very timely. The Council has really advanced the values and ethos of our democratic and inclusive society.

It's a delight for these reasons to be a part of this ceremony together honouring our learners, about 47 in all. The majority is from 17 special schools for visual impairment. For the learners this should be a huge achievement in view of formidable challenges they had encountered from their first day in school.

It must have been a herculean task mandatorily to make sense of the world around them and to access the requisite information and knowledge imposed by our information society, that's largely driven by people with sight.

What these learners have achieved is not only a result of their own hard-work but also stems from the dedication and commitment of their teachers many of whom have worked beyond the call of duty to translate learning and teaching materials into Braille and large print.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This area is close to our hearts as government and a people. And thus we have declared this the Year of Inclusive Education with the vision to speed up the implementation of our policy on inclusive education in terms of the *Education White Paper 6*.

As a state, in 2007, we ratified the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* and thereby committed to implement an inclusive education system for all.

We have an obligation therefore to respect and promote the dignity of people with disabilities ensuring their seamless integration into communities.

And on this matter, ladies and gentlemen, we have made huge strides in the democratic era. For instance, in 2009 we introduced a comprehensive programme to improve the quality of education and support for learners with visual impairment in ordinary and special schools.

We have introduced a multi-pronged approach that includes a teacher development programme, provision of assistive devices and technology and provision of Learner Teacher Support Materials (LTSM) in Braille and Large Print.

To address backlogs in provision of LTSM in Braille and Large Print, we delivered prescribed works and selected maths textbooks for Grades 10 - 12 in Braille and Large Print to all 22 schools over the past 18 months at a cost of nearly R5 million.

We have also initiated a process to procure master copies of the new CAPS (Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements) textbooks in Braille and Large Print. By the end of 2014 every learner in each grade should have a textbook in accessible format for each subject.

Our Department has further initiated a process of adapting learner workbooks, in their highly visual content, into versions that can be produced in Braille and Large Print.

A high percentage of workbooks has been adapted and delivered to schools in all languages from GR-9 (Mathematics, Languages and Life Skills.) We anticipate that this multi-million Rand project will be completed by March 2014.

We're aware of capacity challenges experienced in the Braille printing sector. We're collaborating with the Department of Arts and Culture and the visual impairment sector to find solutions.

In respect of the National Senior Certificate exams, our Department improves the quality of Braille papers each year. This year examiners in all subjects collaborated with subject specialists from schools for visual impairment to adapt the papers for translation into Braille.

We are confident that the standard of papers has not been compromised. This is to ensure that candidates with visual impairment attain qualifications that are at par with those of other matriculants in the system.

Special measures are also in place to ensure there are braille experts at each marking-centre where braille scripts are being marked and that the debrailling of the scripts will be of a high standard.

We have in place several initiatives to ensure teachers acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to teach high quality Braille. We are also exploring technology options to enhance Braille and expand access to information through ICT and the Internet.

Allow me at this point to congratulate Zak Claassen for exceptional achievement. Zak, from Prinshof School for Visual Impairment, has obtained 7 distinctions and 100% in Life Sciences. Well done Zak! And all thanks to our great teachers.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We have a duty as a people to increase the number of persons with disabilities who qualify as teachers. I therefore challenge the achievers here with us to consider teaching as a profession. You won’t regret it. This is a noble profession best enhanced and enjoyed by the most talented.

We have availed money within the Funza Lushaka Bursary Scheme specifically to support learners with disabilities aspiring to be teachers. The scheme makes provision for assistive devices among others. We urge also special schools to encourage learners to seize this opportunity.

Many higher education institutions now have support offices that provide excellent services to students with visual impairment and other disabilities.

I have a special message for our matriculants. The certificate in your hands has opened endless opportunities for you. If you haven't done so as yet, this is the time to choose to study further, to learn further and to venture into the business world.

Only the sky is the limit.

We're grateful to Umalusi for affording us this singular privilege to interact with these wonderful young people and, importantly, to wish them success. Dr Rakometsi, we thank you and the team for broadening equal opportunities for young people with disabilities. You have enhances our efforts to discharge a responsibility placed upon us by the first president of democratic South Africa, Dr Nelson Mandela who said in 2004:

"*We cannot claim to have reached anywhere near to where a society should be in terms of practical equality of the disabled. We continue to try. We realise that legislation and regulations are not sufficient for the end of the long walk to equality and non-discrimination.*

Education, raising of awareness, conscientisation, eradication of stigmatisation: these are key elements in achieving non-discrimination against the disabled in practice and in their everyday lives."

Lastly, I wish all our learners success in the coming exams.

I thank you!