

Dialogue and action needed

South Africa will be in “big trouble” if it cannot fix the quality and efficiency of its education system, says outgoing FirstRand chief executive and chairman of the FirstRand Foundation Sizwe Nxasana

Nxasana, who is retiring as chief executive at the end of September, will in future focus more energy on the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT), which he chairs. The NECT aims to strengthen partnerships between business, civil society, government and labour to support the education goals of the National Development Plan.

He told delegates at the debate on improving maths performance: “We

have a vision to increase the number of pupils with a bachelor’s pass to 90% by 2030. This is a huge challenge, particularly when you look at the maths, science and language results.” He noted that of around 13-million children in school, private schools cater for only around one million. “So it is crucial that we sort out education. It requires dialogue and action,” he said.

Nxasana said it was encouraging that the government was looking to address problems in schools’ infra-

structure, management and teacher resources, but he said that it was a “significant challenge” at a time when four of the country’s provinces spend virtually their entire education budgets on salaries alone. The department of basic education now “has a better understanding of its existing resources and can look to manage more effectively in future”, he said. However, “South Africa is good at making plans, but every effort has to be made to develop the state’s capacity to



Sizwe Nxasana.
Photo: Elvis Ntombela

deliver,” said Nxasana.

He warned that South Africa could “hit a brick wall in future” if enough qualified maths teachers did not enter the system. He pointed to the Centre for Development and Enterprise’s teacher supply and demand report released last week, which indicates that while South Africa will be able to produce sufficient teachers overall to meet the needs of schools in the next 10 years, teacher supply is predicted to be mismatched to student needs by phase and subjects. Shortfalls are expected in foundation phase, and in the subjects of languages and maths.

Through NECT, Nxasana said, a platform had been created to support the sharing of knowledge, experience and best practice, with a view to addressing these challenges and improving the quality of education.