

Curriculum Angie Motshekga

Raising the basic education bar for pupils and teachers

LAST year was a watershed year as it marked the completion of the implementation of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (Caps) throughout the education system. It was the year the first cohort of grade 12 pupils wrote the Caps-aligned final examinations for the National Senior Certificate.

Caps came into being as a response to a host of concerns raised by stakeholders in education regarding, among other things, the administrative burden, lack of clarity about what has to be taught, how this is to be assessed and the general approach to outcomes-based education.

Essentially, Caps is the strengthening of the National Curriculum Statement and clearly specifies what should be taught, and which topics should be covered per subject, grade, and per quarter of the school calendar year. It provides guidelines on how assessment must be carried out, adding more content to some subjects such as mathematics and business studies.

Caps has increased the cognitive rigour and demands of the curriculum.

This philosophy is based on the intention to increase high-order questions across all subjects over time and to drive quality.

Last year, with these changes introduced for the first time, we have increased the pass requirements for grades 7, 8 and 9. Pupils are now required to pass eight of the nine subjects on offer. Following the recommendations made by the ministerial committee on pass requirements, led by Prof Brian Cornwell, in December I also announced that the pass mark for grade 12 would be increased as part of our efforts to continue to bring quality to our education.

We are very mindful of the fact that change, no matter how well intended and small it might be, brings about uncertainty and instability. Unfortunately, in our quest to continuously bring about the necessary quality improvements, this has to be done. We are conscious of the fact that teachers, pupils, examiners and moderation panels work bet-

ter with what they know. Change to the curriculum then becomes a learning curve for a host of role players.

However, there is no doubt that over the next few years the system will adapt to these changes, and teachers, examiners and subject advisers will become more confident and adept with Caps and we will reap the benefits of improved outcomes.

We cannot postpone raising the bar in the basic education sector. The journey has started now, in earnest.

During the 2014 National Senior Certificate standardisation process, the chair and CEO of Umalusi, the body responsible for quality assurance, commended the sector for implementing a curriculum of a very high standard. The Umalusi team evaluated Caps and its report was also considered as part of the standardisation process. Umalusi, which

standardisation meeting at which performance in each subject was analysed statistically and qualitatively to ensure that performance was in keeping with performance in previous years. We thank Umalusi for the sterling job it continues to do.

But last year we experienced a strange phenomenon of group copying, identified by Umalusi and my department during the administration of the examinations, which needs to be stamped out.

The quality of education in any system is predicated on the quality of its teachers. The qualification profile of teachers in the sector has improved from 53% in 1990 to 97% in 2013. The data on teacher education in the foundation phase involving universities show huge growth, from 35,275 (teachers) in 2008 to 97,000 in 2013.

These numbers continue to grow. While

using the goals of the National Development Plan and Action Plan 2019.

In its short existence Nect has been able to co-ordinate government and private-sector efforts and resources to maximise the effects of interventions in terms of support provided to schools and districts. Nect has the agility to address some of the challenges in the sector in a way that the government would not be able to do on its own.

The basic education sector is on the right trajectory of addressing quality and efficiency. The first group of grade 11 pupils who were progressed without having met promotion requirements has gone through. It would be unwise to blame the underperformance in some subjects on these pupils.

It is encouraging that some of the pupils that were progressed have attained a matric pass and some obtained bachelors passes.

The phenomenon of progressing learners who have not met promotion requirements is not unique to SA. It happens in countries such as Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Japan, Korea and the UK.

These countries favour automatic progression instead of repetition. This approach has been found to be efficient. We have carried out our first step in dealing with inefficiency. We need to strengthen our support programme for such pupils.

We will work hard to sustain the improvement in pupil performance, enhanced accountability at all levels of the system, greater focus on basic functionality of schools, and protecting time for teaching and learning. We will also improve monitoring and support for teaching and learning.

The implementation of Caps might have caused instability to the extent of distress in some subjects, but the benefits of it in the long term will outlive our generation of leaders and managers in the sector. We have more than enough lessons to propel us to improved learning outcomes.

■ Motshekga is Basic Education Minister. This is an edited version of her speech at the 2014 matric results announcement.

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plays a critical role in protecting the integrity of the National Senior Certificate examination, has, after rigorous verification of all examination processes, declared last year's exams as free, fair and credible. This achievement is attributed to the unwavering commitment demonstrated by examination officials at the Department of Basic Education and across the nine provinces.

Umalusi exercises its quality assurance mandate by implementing the following measures which extend over the entire examination cycle:

- moderation of the question papers, which is done by a panel of subject experts;
- monitoring of the writing of the exams;
- moderation of the marking;
- standardisation of the subject results; and
- verification of the results data.

On December 23 Umalusi convened the

this is encouraging, studies still point to the need to ensure that teachers' and subject advisers' competencies are improved.

President Jacob Zuma has been making a call to make education a societal issue, and school governing bodies are among the key role players. Parents, pupils and teachers working together have the huge potential of ensuring that school governing bodies in the majority of schools provide the required oversight, with improving learning outcomes as their main task.

The implementation of Caps has exposed all these shortcomings.

However, the establishment of the National Education Collaboration Trust (Nect) was the best decision ever taken by both the private sector and government. It has played a crucial role in galvanising the government, labour, business and civil society, directing their energies and resources towards real-