

New SG spells out her vision

Mbude wants provincial education department to focus on reason for its existence — the child

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On Tuesday, reporter Gugu Phandle sat down with newly appointed Eastern Cape department of education superintendent-general Dr Naledi Mbude for a question-and-answer session.

Q: Dr Mbude as the incumbent SG, what is your vision for the provincial department of education?

A: That's a tough one, because in a department where there is so much to be done, you don't know where to start. But you know that you don't want things to remain the same. One of the important things about a vision is that it should be about the existential impact. My vision is that we must always remember why we are here and that is because of the child.

Q: The rollout of the vaccine for teachers has been much anticipated. What is the status of the vaccine rollout for educators in the province?

A: All teachers and support staff in public and private schools will be vaccinated. From June 23, we will start with the rollout to all our schools. We have 52,000 teachers. The total population in our schools, including cleaners and drivers, is 76,000. We have 67 confirmed sites out of the list of over 100 schools we were given by the health

department.

Q: The Covid-19 period saw reports of an alleged misuse of funds to secure personal protective equipment for schools, which caused a ripple effect causing deficits in the department. What is your response?

A: I have seen media reports. There was no misuse of Covid-19 funds in the department for the procurement of PPE. We had two cases. One was of conflict of interest and the other of bribery that we have just heard of from the Special Investigating Unit. National Treasury distributed the threshold to all provinces to buy PPE. The province is below that threshold. The SIU has just given us the report on the bribery case. In the conflict of interest case, due process has happened. The official was suspended and the disciplinary hearing will be on Friday. The books of the department were subjected to a process by the Hawks and SIU and nothing irregular came out.

Q: The 2020 academic year was largely affected by Covid-19 complexities, which caused a drop in the matric pass rate. What is the goal for this year?

A: The grade 12 class of 2020 had a normal grade 11. This is why, even though we had a decline of 8%, we still could achieve 68.1% because they had a solid grade 11.

From the 68.1% pass rate we got last year, I must be modest to say a 5% increase will be what we strive for. Anything beyond that is a blessing.



ON A MISSION: New provincial education department superintendent-general Naledi Mbude wants to improve the speed at which her unit addresses issues. Picture: RANDELL ROSKRUGE

Q: What special provisions have been put in place to support the matric class?

A: We must accept children in grade 12 have psychosocial challenges; people are dying around them. That is why we have put a psychosocial support system in place.

I always worry about the girl child. Girl children contend with heading families and teenage pregnancies. And when you educate a woman, you educate a nation. Looking at the girl child in matric, I will go out of my way to provide security and the provision of sanitary towels through partnerships.

We are looking at the proposal of having interactive smart boards that will broadcast lessons across the province. Covid has taught us classrooms can be anywhere.

Q: The department of education is known to have an infrastructure backlog in the billions of rand. What are your plans to fast-track infrastructure development?

A: One of the lessons we have learnt is that it is expensive to build in brick. I would like to see us moving towards where buildings go to where learners are, that is, alternative building technology. If learner numbers diminish, those buildings can be moved elsewhere. We are working with public works to reduce backlogs in the province.

Q: What are areas of concern in the department?

A: I am concerned about the speed we move to address issues. People in the department are scared the pandemic will kill them; they are afraid to leave their homes

during the third wave.

If teachers have to be at school every day with learners, we must do the same in our offices. Managers must lead. The collapse of operations because of Covid-19 has had a negative effect on the department. Therefore, I call on colleagues for us to rebuild.

Q: What project would the office of the SG boast about, particularly since the start of the 2021 academic year?

A: We have a commitment towards ensuring inclusive education. The education of disabled children has been neglected for a long time. Society has boxed children in. Each school must be an inclusive school where it does not matter if you have a mild or a severe disability. We are moving towards making schools inclusive.