

Advertorial

'The goal of the Free State department of education is to ensure that **quality learning and teaching** takes place in every classroom, every day.' These are the words of Free State Education MEC Dr Tate Makgoe. This is how his department has gone about achieving this goal

There is no doubt that the education system in South Africa has seen major developments since 1994.

"We are proud of the numerous developments that were ushered in since the dawn of democracy. The significance of an effective education system cannot be overemphasised. Basic education remains the priority of this administration because of the positive influence it has on society's fortunes," says Dr Tate Makgoe.

"Research demonstrates that basic education is a precondition for embarking on a fight against poverty and encouraging short and long-term economic growth. The goal of the Free State department of education [FSDoE] is to ensure that quality learning and teaching takes place in every classroom, every day.

"Our partnership with the Kagiso Shanduka Trust [KST] has played a vital role in our quest to achieve this goal, and we recognise the contribution the project has made in critical focus areas over the past year."

Makgoe says stability has been achieved in curriculum reform, and the FSDoE is working with their

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– Free State Education MEC
Dr Tate Makgoe

provincial counterparts, guaranteeing full curriculum coverage at classroom level, which will be the focus of all programmes through enhanced accountability for learning and collaboration with all stakeholders and partners.

The department's partnership with the KST came about in 2011, when the Shanduka Foundation and the Kagiso Trust contemplated how they could draw on their knowledge of education and experience in education development to achieve a greater impact on education transformation in South Africa.

This led to the two parties signing a collaboration agreement in 2012 with the aim of working together to improve pupil performance in public schools and to the establishment of the KST in 2013.

The simple concept on which the KST was founded is that education is empowerment. This concept has shaped six years of transforming education in the Free State, and is set to achieve even more over the next three years.

This partnership has already borne fruit – the 2019 matric results put the Free State, with an 88.4% pass rate in the National Senior Certificate exams, in the number one spot in the country (see box).

"The biggest achievement between ourselves and KST was being named one of the best provinces in South Africa, but the cherry on top was when Fezile Dabi became the best-performing district in the country. A few years ago, this district was performing at between 58% and 63%. For them to improve their

performance to more than 90% and outperform some of the wealthiest provinces and districts shows that, if we make this partnership work, we can achieve positive results," says Makgoe.

A huge part of this success is the development and implementation of the District Whole School Development (DWSD) programme, which targets schools in the Fezile Dabi and Motheo districts of the Free State. The DWSD programme aims to equip pupils and teachers with the skills to experience the power of education at its fullest so that they can reach their utmost potential.

"The goal is to make a sustainable impact on academic performance and social wellbeing. This is achieved by partnering with like-minded organisations to address an entire spectrum of issues related to education, from infrastructure development to curriculum and leadership development," says Makgoe.

The programme leverages five platforms to deliver its goals:

- Empowerment and transformation workshops;
- Curriculum development;
- Infrastructure development;
 - Leadership development, and
 - Social development.

How does DWSD work?

BASIC INFRASTRUCTURE:

With the primary objective to create spaces that are conducive to learning and teaching, all schools receive basic infrastructure where it is required, and where it is not already being provided by government. Basic infrastructure refers to the building or renovation of facilities such as ablution blocks, classrooms and perimeter fencing.

INCENTIVE INFRASTRUCTURE:

Schools that perform above the target that has been set by the Free State department of education qualify for science laboratories, libraries, computer centres, maths centres, multimedia centres and sports facilities. In 2019, 95 schools received infrastructure upgrades.

"This partnership has delivered infrastructure in the most cost-effective way. It has delivered projects three to four times cheaper than government can achieve. This is critical for us," says Makgoe.

EMPOWERMENT & TRANSFORMATION WORKSHOPS:

All schools are introduced to the DWSD programme through an Empowerment and Transformation Workshop, commonly known as a retreat. The process aims to create unity within the schools through the development of a cohesive vision and a strategic plan to ensure long-term success and sustainability.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: The social development element of the programme currently offers vision screening and testing, and the provision of spectacles where prescribed. Service provider Premier Optical has developed sustainable solutions to optimise resources by training community healthcare workers, educators and FSDoE district officials in the fundamentals and techniques of vision screening.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT: "Through this method, educators have the opportunity to improve their content knowledge and observe effective teaching methodologies. In preparation for the final exams, KST service providers work intensively with schools by designing mock test papers, reviewing past papers and providing direct support to pupils where necessary," says Makgoe.



Superintendent-general, Advocate Tsoarelo Malakoane

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Key highlights of the KST interventions are the transfer of effective teaching skills and an improvement in curriculum delivery methodologies, as well as fully resourced specialised classrooms that have directly resulted in improved pupil performance

– Advocate Tsoarelo Malakoane, head of department, FSDoE

"I cannot overemphasise the value of a confident and vested teacher in the schooling system," adds Makgoe.

"The KST's educator development interventions have empowered and upskilled more than 5 000 educators in the Fezile Dabi and Motheo districts. Over the past five years, we have seen a skilled and motivated cohort of teachers demonstrating their professional development gains through established and sustainable professional learning communities, schools subject forums and school-based support teams."

Curriculum development subject focus is on physical science and economics for grades 10 to 12, maths literacy and numeracy.

Group training and classroom-based support is provided to all teachers.

Subject mentors provide additional support by co-teaching subjects that are challenging for teachers.

These are the numbers showing how the DWSD programme has impacted education in the Fezile Dabi and Motheo districts over the past seven years:

- 264 project schools;
- 330 schools attended the Empowerment and Transformation Workshops;
- 351 511 pupils have been indirectly impacted by the Empowerment and Transformation Workshops;
- 427 pupils have been referred for further medical attention;
- 116 824 pupils underwent eye tests;
- 7 795 pairs of spectacles have been donated;
- 261 small, micro and medium-sized businesses have been supported;
- 334 new school facilities have been built;
- 284 school facilities have been renovated;
- 1 575 temporary jobs have been created.

Over the next three years, during the last phase of the DWSD programme, there will be a streamlined focus on the sustainability road map and instructional leadership. The sustainability road map aims to drive ongoing systemic change so that system leaders are equipped and empowered to take ownership of the skills and tools provided beyond the programme's interventions.

The sustainability road map will cut across the system and look at capacity of district directors, circuit managers and subject advisers, and the extent to which they provide support to schools. Furthermore, it will ensure that this is not only confined to compliance, but also addresses support and access to capacity, content knowledge and classroom practices.

"Teaching and learning must occupy the top agenda of every



THE BEST START The District Whole School Development programme aims to equip pupils and teachers with the skills to experience the power of education at its fullest

TAKING THE LEAD TO empower pupils



INCENTIVES Schools that perform well qualify for science laboratories, libraries, computer centres, maths centres, multimedia centres and sports facilities



IN NUMBERS:

399 673

pupils have benefited from their schools' participation in Transformation and Empowerment Workshops

8 262

educators have received training

302

schools have participated



TO SEE IS TO KNOW

Why does the KST do eye tests?

Impaired vision has a drastic impact on a child's development, making it difficult to focus on schoolwork and leading to poor hand-eye coordination, which also affects the child's ability to participate fully on the playground and join sports teams.

What's more, it directly affects reading comprehension. This is important because, without this critical skill, understanding other learning components becomes difficult.

Some of the signs and symptoms that a child might have difficulty seeing things may include blurred vision, headaches, tearing when doing a visually demanding task, reducing the eye aperture when attempting to focus and tilting the head to one side.

A child who battles to see properly will also most likely experience challenges around self-confidence.

So far, the KST has tested more than 100 000 pupils in the Fezile Dabi and Motheo school districts.

More than 7 000 pupils have received spectacles.

The vision screening is carried out by community health workers who are part of government's Primary Health Care reengineering initiative. They are trained by the DWSD programme and work in collaboration with the Free State department of health.

In addition, the programme has also trained teachers on vision screening, and pupils who require further medical treatment are referred to the Free State department of health.

In September 2019, 407 pupils from 12 primary schools in Villiers, Sasolburg, Vredfort, Tweeling and Steynsrus received spectacles after eye testing and screening.

THE PROOF IS IN THE RESULTS:

FREE STATE MATRICS HAVE SHOWN THE COUNTRY HOW TO DO IT

In 2016, the pass rate was 93.2% and the Free State was the top-performing province in the country.

In 2017, the province again took top honours with their matric pass rate of 86%, and Fezile Dabi was the top-performing district in South Africa.

In 2018, Fezile Dabi attained a 92.3% pass rate, making it the top-performing district nationally for the second year in a row, and Motheo achieved an 85.1% pass rate, moving up into fourth place out of five Free State education districts. The province achieved a pass rate of 87.5%.

The Free State Grade 12 class of 2019 attained 88.4% in the National Senior Certificate examinations – an increase of 0.9% from 2018.

"Although it is geographically a farming and rural province, the Free State has proven that, with support, hard work, collective dedication and determination, the opportunity of quality education can be achieved for all. The province has outperformed some of the wealthiest and better-resourced provinces to attain the number one spot nationally for the third time," says Makgoe.

The Fezile Dabi district obtained 90.3% in 2019, showing a decline from 92.3% in 2018, but it still remained the leading district in the Free State and the fourth leading district nationally. The Motheo district attained 87.9% in 2019, showing an improvement from 85.1% in 2018.

educational institution, and therefore personal development is one of the strategic elements that assist instructional leaders with the proper selection of relevant materials, and enable them to monitor the effective implementation of teaching and learning strategies. The aligning of curriculum, instruction and assessment standards is a fundamental practice to support instructional leadership. The effective use of resources and decentralised accountability mechanisms are important elements that are instrumental in improving learning," says Makgoe.

"Support and resources must be focused at district level for sustainable school academic performance and functionality. Instructional leadership is one of the tools we use to empower all our education districts through our partnership with the KST."