

Mr Bussmann, the Consul General of the Federal Republic of Germany
The Principal, Mr Battenberg
Chairman of the Management Board, Mr Wido Schnabel
Educators
Parents
Learners

Thank you for the invitation and the opportunity to address you today.

I spend most of my time addressing learners and educators from public schools, and it is only on the rare occasion do I get the opportunity to address independent schools such as this.

Independent schools play an important role in the education system as a whole in South Africa, and particularly in the Western Cape.

The reason being, is that this Government firmly believes in the open, opportunity society, where:

- a) Citizens are afforded the opportunity to determine their own choices. I.e. To expand choice, and not inhibit choice, and...
- b) Where, every child is afforded the opportunity to realize their full potential through access to a good education.

If we consider education in the Western Cape, we can confidently say that the independent school system in this province fulfills both of these elements which are important if we are ever to fulfill the vision of an open opportunity society for all.

Firstly, the independent school system allows parents the opportunity to exercise choice. Do they enter their child into the public schooling system or the independent schooling system? Do they enroll at a faith-based school, or one that is based on cultural values, like Deutsche International? The choice is there.

Then secondly, do our independent schools provide access to good education? The answer is again, yes. In the majority of cases independent school learners in the Western Cape are afforded access to quality education, especially in key subjects such as Mathematics and Physical Science, which are key to the development and progress of any country.

The seal of excellence which you will/have received today from the Federal German Government bears testimony to the fact that you are providing access to quality education and I would like to congratulate you all for this prestigious honour.

The Western Cape Education Department shares the independent schooling sector's drive to make choice and quality a factor in the public state education system.

Many of our schools both independent and public, provide some of the best tuition in the world and we are proud of their achievements in comparison to schools in other provinces.

It is always wonderful to see a healthy competitive mix of top achievers from both systems being honoured for achievement in the National Senior Certificate Examinations each year.

The real challenge for us now is to improve the quality of education in our weaker public sector schools.

While we believe that there is no quick fix when it comes to education, we do believe that some of our interventions are making headway.

The 2010 National Senior Results did reveal a decrease in the number of underperforming schools, as well as an increase in the number and quality of passes throughout the Western Cape.

But this effort is ongoing and we will continue to make a sustained effort in improving the system, along with improving our relations with the independent school sector.

In the last year, we made various inroads in this regard. For example, we expanded our provincial litnum testing programme to include independent schools to the programme for the very first time and we encourage further participation from our independent schools. We also moved the management of our independent schools to head office, ensuring that they receive uniform responses and support from a focused team of officials and do not have to deal with a range of people in the different districts.

Together, we are slowly expanding choice and access to quality education.

And we will know when we have fulfilled our vision for an open opportunity society for all when a parent from Pinelands sends his or her child to a school in Langa or when a learner from Khayelitsha gets offered a bursary in an independent school such as this, but decided that the school closer to home is just as good.

This is the choice ultimate choice that we would like to offer.

This is how we would like to see the future of education in the Western Cape.

Thank-you and congratulations!