

Chairperson

It is an honour, pleasure and a great privilege for me to speak on this grand occasion of the 5th Global Conference on the elimination of Child Labour.

The saying, that we did not inherit this world from our ancestors, but we borrow it from our children, makes this conference even more meaningful.

Broadly, as an education sector, our core function is teaching and learning, which means our mandate is that of keeping learners in the classroom, while giving them quality education which, as our mantra dictates, to ***be an innovative hub for quality teaching and learning that produces learners developed to explore opportunities for life long success.***

As a Department we say a classroom is a centrepiece of all our operations, meaning, we exist to ensure that our learners are in the classroom, not somewhere else doing hard labour and being exploited by people who should be nurturing them.

As we speak, a process is in motion to strengthen the South African Schools Act (SASA) to increase the jail sentence for those who keep children of school going age away from the classroom.

As it is now, the provision of the South African Schools Act is that anyone who keep the child of school going age at home will be subjected to a sentence of months in prison, but as a sector we are advocating this should be increased to twelve years.

We are advocating this because we want to send a strong message that all children of school going age should be in school.

In a sense, we are now taking care of children from the cradle to adulthood.

The function shift of the Early Childhood Development (ECD) means that we now want to take care and monitor children development from birth basically, this speaks into our seriousness, to resolve and the determination to ensure, that we close all the gaps for young people to find themselves being exploited and doing child labour while they should be in school.

Through SA SAMS we can ensure the attendance of every learner because at the very least, we want to ensure that every learner has a matric to enable them to get dignified jobs and avoid being exploited by predators who exploit our children to quench their insatiable appetite for profit making.

Our psycho social programmes, that we have as a Department, which are beyond curriculum delivery, are there to ensure that we take care of psychological needs of learners so that despite difficulties that they face in life, we assist them to re-focus and keep them in the classroom.

Our National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP), which provides nutritional meal to 2.4 million learners out of 2.8 learners in our system as a province is in place to also ensure that even house learners, who come from indigent families, do not leave school just because their families cannot afford to feed them.

Our learner transport programme is also there to ensure that learners who otherwise would leave school because of the distance from their homes to school, are kept at school by providing them safe means to travel to school.

In essence, chairperson, the Department of Education moves beyond its core mandate, which is teaching and learning, to ensure that learners are kept in school, thereby avoiding and preventing exploitation and child labour.