Endeavours to ease rural teachers’ load

SMBONGILE MOLELE

THE Eastern Cape Department of Education, in conjunction with the National Department of Basic Education, has embarked on an initiative to reduce the heavy workload of teachers at schools in remote areas.

The rural schools often lack resources. This is why the department launched an initiative to intervene by providing some tools that would make the job of teachers easier while they have to teach many grades in one class.

The department came up with a pilot project called rural Multi-grade schools, which is expected to be piloted in the Eastern Cape, Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal.

Last week Tuesday, a group of 60 educators from isolated rural Multi-grade schools in the Mount Frere education district received Life Players devices (similar to a radio) and 1,000 workbooks from the department, donated by the British Council.

These tools are uploaded with content for the pupils to listen to, while the teacher is busy doing other school work or busy with other grades.

The two-yeared programme at the Roman Catholic Church hall started with the handing over of the tool kits and was followed by training to use the Life Players resources and workbooks provided by the British Council.

The Department of Education Deputy Chief Specialist and project coordinator, Pumla Gaxiwane, said the reason they initiated this effort is that the teachers in the rural areas are facing a large number of pupils which compelled them to divide the grades which resulted in one teacher teaching more than one grade.

"By doing so we want to ensure that learners are getting quality education and improve the quality of teaching. As we know the rural schools lack resources that is why we came with this pilot project. We cannot get quality education if the teachers are not empowered," said Gaxiwane.

He said the project was first implemented in 2009 and about 60 educators had been trained in this programme out of 1,000 educators expected to take part in this programme in the Eastern Cape.

Ponka Mavuthu, subject advisor in the Mt Frere District, stressed that they would ensure that they monitored the project. She said they also wanted to make sure that they supported the teachers, even those who did not attend the training session.

Thandile Ntshangu, a teacher from the Colwenas Springs Junior Secondary School, expressed her gratitude with the initiative of the department, stating that they were facing some difficulties in rural schools in terms of dealing with more than one grade.

She said the effort would definitely simplify their work.

Meanwhile, the regional digital training manager for the British Council in Sub-Saharan Africa, Phil Samboni, said it was their main mission to make classes more interesting and to give learners a decent education.

Youths give back to community

AYANDA MILUSA MADIKIZELA

GROWING up in tough circumstances saw the youth of Mahobo locality in Mt Frere wanting to give back to their community.

A group of seven local Mahobo Youth Ambassadors — who are fortunate enough to be employed — got together and decided to help develop their area through education.

Last Saturday, the ambassadors donated school shoes to 300 pupils from different schools in Mt Frere and in Mt Ayliff.

Sabelo Rakaza, one of the organizers, said the initiative started in 2013, when they saw the state or complete lack of school shoes. "Having grown up in those rural areas with our parents struggling to make ends meet, we decided to make life better for our younger brothers and sisters and for the entire community," said Rakaza.

They also built a house for an underprivileged family of 14 in the Mahobo locality.

Rakaza said they also assist child head-of-families by organizing food parcels and seedlings for them and ensuring that they get the necessary government aid.

"We also provide information about bursaries and learnerships, since we know youths in rural areas are not exposed to such information and they end up losing out on opportunities," he added.

Mt Frere schools that benefited were Sandhulile, Mahobo, Solladila, Lusitini, Kraasa and Buffalo-Neck Junior Secondary School (JSS) while from Mt Ayliff, No-Bita Special School benefitted.

"In all other schools, we donated to 50 pupils. At Nolita, 35 pupils get shoes and 15 at Sandhulile," he added.

The ambassadors are Sabelo Rakaza, Samkelo Shoko, Patiwa Subana, Moresi Sigximis, Zikhona Ngquabathi, Nceha Mqomme and Nobulele Mdumngwana.