

# The honourable Angelina Motshekga

Minister of Basic Education



**E**arly childhood is a critical period in an individual's development as this is when the foundations for physical, cognitive and emotional development are laid. The first two years of life are particularly important as a child's development during this time forms the basis for future growth and achievement.

Numerous studies have provided evidence that exposure of children to biological and psycho-social risk factors associated with poverty leads to inequalities in early development, and in turn impact on later educational achievement and life opportunities, which reinforces the cycle of poverty.

It is now commonly held that earlier educational interventions can be expected to have greater returns than later remedial interventions. Preschool education represents one such intervention. There is a considerable international literature to support the view that attending preschool can produce educational benefits that persist at least several years into schooling. Some research has even found that the benefits of preschool, and specifically of learning to read effectively at an early stage, can be compounded over time as positive effects spill over into other subject domains.

It is within the light of the above that the South African government recognises that increasing access to, as well as improving the quality of, early childhood development (ECD) provision, particularly for poor children, will contribute significantly to improving the learning outcomes of children within the basic education sector. ECD is given specific attention in the National Development Plan and also occupies pride of place in the Action Plan to 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025.

The Diagnostic Review of Early Childhood Development records significant achievements made in the delivery of comprehensive ECD services in the country. We are proud of these. There are, nonetheless, still considerable challenges that need to be addressed.

Under the leadership of the Department of Social Development, a National Integrated Programme of Action has been developed.

This plan outlines the responsibility of each of the respective departments in relation to services for young children. The Department of Basic Education is responsible for the following:

- Developing curriculum and stimulation materials (for children in the birth to four years age cohort); these inform the ECD services as articulated in the Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Education of 2010 and the Integrated Programme of Action for Early Childhood Development – Moving Ahead (2013 – 2018).
- Training and paying a stipend for practitioners working at registered ECD centres as part of the Expanded Public Works Programme.
- Monitoring and supporting provinces in the implementation of the services provided by the Department of Basic Education.
- Collaborating with all other departments as required.

Some of our key achievements include the following:

- A National Curriculum Framework for children birth to four years has been developed and gazetted for public comment.
- A total of 13,742 ECD practitioners have undergone training between 2009 and 2012 towards a qualification.
- A joint plan has been developed in collaboration with the ETDP SETA to develop a Recognition of Prior Learning project to address the training needs identified in the sector for implementation in 2014.
- An Integrated Programme of Action for Early Childhood Development – Moving Ahead (2013 – 2018) has been finalised in collaboration with the Department of Social Development.
- Monitoring and support visits to provinces have been conducted regularly.

Among the key challenges that are being addressed are:

- The lack of reliable data to inform the sector plan: this is being addressed through a comprehensive ECD facility audit by the Department of Social Development.
- Low minimum entry requirements for ECD practitioners working with younger children (NQF level 1): these are under consideration.

We need to continue to work together to do more for the children of this country. Quality ECD services will ensure that all children have the best start in life. Congratulations on this publication; which will add to the vast body of knowledge that we have in the country. "Every child deserves a fair chance".