

PRESSURE ON MODEL SCHOOL TO SHAPE-UP

By Tselane Moiloa



KROONSTAD – The Free State provincial government’s education theme during the weeklong celebrations to mark former president Nelson Mandela’s birthday on Wednesday, July 18, has resonated with learners at Bodibeng Secondary School who have been asked to change the path the school has taken in recent years.

Located between the dusty townships of Marabastad and Seeisoville, Bodibeng was counted among the best schools in Free State and South Africa during the apartheid regime and the early 90s, after producing luminaries like the late Adelaide Tambo and former Minister of Communications Ivy Matsepe-Casaburri, Mosuioa “Terror” Lekota, MEC Butana Khompela and his soccer-coach brother Steve Khompela.

The school, which was founded in 1928 under the name Bantu High, was the only school for black people during the apartheid regime which offered a joint matriculation board qualification instead of the Bantu education senior certificate, putting it on par with the regime’s best schools of the time. Until 1982, it was the only high school in Kroonstad.

But the famed reputation took a knock, despite an abundance of resources.

“There is obviously a lot of pressure on us to continue with the legacy and it only makes sense that we come through with our promise to do so,” Principal Itumeleng Bekeer said.

Unlike many schools which complain about things like unsatisfactory teacher-learner ratios, Bekeer said this is not a concern because the 24 classes from grade eight to 12 have an average 1:24 teacher-learner ratio.

However, the socio-economic circumstances in the surrounding townships impact negatively on learners, with a lot coming to school on empty stomachs.

“That is why we have a school nutrition programme because we know the backgrounds many of these children come from. A lot have lost both parents, while some stay with grandparents and take care of siblings. Unemployment is also an issue,” the principal said.

Bekeer, who has been the head of the school since January last year said the school had been performing badly in recent past years due to “leadership instability”.

Things started deteriorating after the former principal's commitments grew, where he was mentoring principals from other schools, Bekeer explained, without failing to mention that together with the teachers and parents, they are working to steer the ship in a better direction.

The school is already preparing for the matriculants trial examinations in September and have enlisted the help of the Central University of Technology to help with educators.

"We have a partnership with CUT where they will provide us with some of the best educators in the province to give our learners lessons in a mission to assess whether they understand the basics of the subjects they are doing. They will do one subject over three lessons intensively before the assessment and final preparation for the exams," he said.

The classes of this kind started last year and have proven to be working as the pass rate jumped from 45 percent in 2010 to 67.4 percent in 2011.

"There are only 37 learners in matric which is why I believe with that ratio we should actually be getting 100 percent and that is possible. The teachers' morale which was previously bad has improved and the same goes for learners' discipline. Attendance has been good this year," the former South Africa Democratic Teachers Union (Sadtu) national negotiator said.

Before moving on to paint the school with the premier Ace Magashule and other members of the provincial executive committee for their 67 minutes for Madiba, MEC for Police, Roads and Transport Butana Khompela, told learners to work hard because that is the only way they can achieve their dreams.

"During our time, a pass was always a guarantee. The only battle was what symbol we would get and whether we would go to university. These days, just passing is a challenge and learners think passing with an E is satisfactory.

This must change," he said to a loud applause.

[Source: www.publiceyenews.com]