

# Parents 'key to schooling'

## Management, rather than lack of money, the problem — Ramphele

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THE involvement of parents in schools, rather than money and the resources it could buy, was what made schools effective, activist and businesswoman Mamphele Ramphele said yesterday.

The poor quality of most of the South African public education system, in which only 29% of any grade 1 class achieved a matric certificate, was “a national crisis” and should be addressed by the whole society, Ramphele said.

She was one of the participants in the Dinokeng group that this week published three scenarios for SA's future to 2020 as an incentive to public discussion on how to shape the country's future.

Providing increased physical and human resources to the majority of SA's poorly performing schools would do little or nothing to rectify the crisis in South African

education, Stellenbosch University economist Prof Seryaas van der Berg said in a presentation to the Human Sciences Research Council this week.

“Ja, money won't make it happen,” Ramphele said. “What makes schools effective is involved parents ... that doesn't cost anything. All that requires is leadership.”

This did not mean that resources were not important. But without effective leadership, resources would not help that much, she said.

Van der Berg said that instead of education being a source of reduced inequality, it was often the source of entrenched inequality because the rich could afford good education for their children and the poor were left in schools in which little or no learning took place.

While there was a strong correlation between education and socioeconomic status in SA, the difference between the educational

attainment of the well-off and the poor was larger in SA than in any other country in the world, Van der Berg said.

There was in fact a part of the historically black public school system that was so poor that “virtually no learning takes place at all”, which was a “huge problem” for SA and its future, including its future economic success.

Instead of throwing more money at schools, SA had to work to improve school efficiency and functionality in order to rectify the problem, he said.

Ramphele said the tragedy of the South African public schooling system was that “the money is there” but there was a managerial problem that was hampering improvement.

Van der Berg said SA needed to put in place “accountability mechanisms” that went beyond governmental mechanisms, because governments were not effective in

demanding accountability since “a government is not going to be severely punished for (providing) poor education”.

The soon-to-be-established National Education Evaluation and Development Unit — which would recommend mechanisms to Education Minister Naledi Pandor for the monitoring and evaluation of schools — was a step in the right direction, but had not gone far enough, he said.

In a report on the unit, recently handed to Pandor, it was recommended that the unit be legislated for as soon as possible.

ANC president Jacob Zuma, who becomes SA's fourth democratically installed president tomorrow, is to announce his Cabinet on Monday. It is not yet known whether his Cabinet will encompass one education ministry or two, or who the education minister — or ministers — will be.

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