

Press Release

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SOUTH AFRICAN
INSTITUTE OF
RACE RELATIONS

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Open letter to the Minister of Basic Education

MS Angie Motshekga

222 Struben Street

Pretoria

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Dear Ms Motshekga

Your department's statement 'South African Institute of Race Relations got it wrong' (24 July 2012) refers.

The statistical data contained within the *Sunday Times* article 'Shock Report on Schools', dated 22 July 2012, that you refer to came from our *South Africa Survey 2010-2011*, which was published in January of this year. The data in the *Survey* itself is collated from various sources, all of which are acknowledged. The errors contained in the article are not ours but those of the *Sunday Times*.

Highlighting, as your department does, the improvements South Africa has made in the provision of physical infrastructure in schools misses the bigger picture: that the majority of South African children will not emerge from the education system with the skills, expertise, or competence necessary to thrive in South Africa's increasingly tertiary economy.

The data we reported showed that of the 24 793 schools in your control only 5 252 schools had libraries in 2011, that is 21%. However, only 1 855, or 8%, of these schools actually had stocked libraries. That is not good enough. Likewise, the number of schools with laboratories stood at 3 772 in 2011, that is 15%. Only 1 231, or 5%, of schools had laboratories that were stocked.

Furthermore, the schooling system suffers from a high rate of attrition. Only half of pupils entering grade 1 will get through to matric. Only one in three grade 1 pupils actually go on to pass matric and only one in ten grade 1 pupils pass well enough to study further at university. Only one in a hundred will achieve a distinction in Mathematics.

It is true, therefore, that only a small percentage of pupils in your schooling system will emerge from it with the necessary skills. Nor does the problem stop in South African schools, for the poor quality of education there feeds into university.

Once at university, students often lack the necessary numeracy and literacy skills required to cope with the rigours of tertiary education. Although 230 596 pupils enrolled for a three-year degree in 2008, only 31 451 graduated with such a degree at the end of 2010.

For those who drop out of the schooling system, a bleak future awaits. The Institute has been able to demonstrate that as many as half of young black men are unemployed. South Africa has the lowest labour market participation rates among comparative countries.

For you to claim, as you did earlier this year, that the schooling system is 'making great strides' is not true. The truth is that only 30% of people that enter your system will complete matric.

Arguably, this kind of performance is now the single biggest impediment to black advancement in South Africa. For your department to suggest anything to the contrary is not only disingenuous but unfair to all the South Africans who, through no fault of their own, will be subjected to a schooling system you manage and control.

What South Africa requires is an education administration that is willing to admit that the schooling system in the country is far from good enough. It is unfortunate therefore that the tone of your statement suggests that this day is still far away.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Snyman

Researcher

South African Institute of Race Relations

Ends
