

OBE INFO

FREE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION Curriculum Delivery and Support SEPT 2004

CURRICULUM ISSUES

From recent reports from across the province, the following issues have been identified as needing attention:

TIMETABLES

It is worrying to see that schools do not apply the national policy as regards tuition time for learners. Strangely enough, the traditional timetable of 10 periods of a half hour each is still in place in many schools. This gives only 25 hours of instructional time - well below the 26.5 hours required from Grade 4 to Grade 7 and the 27.5 hours required from Grade 8 to Grade 12. It is in any case very undesirable to have 30 minute periods for OBE – usually more time is needed.

Schools are reminded again that the following applies:

The timetable of the schools must meet the requirement as presented in the National Policy regarding instructional; time for school subjects, G.N 1473 of 1999 published in Government Gazette NO. 20692 dated 10 December 1999 (This can be found in the ELRC 'Policy handbook for Educators', page A-31).

In terms of Section 4 of the Employment of Educators Act, 1998 the formal school day for teachers will be 7 hours. The formal instructional time during the formal week of 35 hours must be as follows:

General Education and Training (GET)

- Foundation Phase: Grades 1-2 = 22 hours 30 minutes
Grade 3 = 25 hours
- Intermediate Phase: Grades 4-6 = 26 hours 30 minutes
- Senior Phase: Grade 7 = 26 hours 30 minutes
- Grades 8-9 = 27 hours 30 minutes

Further Education and Training (FET)

- Grades 10–12 = 27 hours 30 minutes
(Note: This will change to 29 hours 30 minutes when the NCS is phased in from 2006)

If any extra time needs to be added to a timetable, a reading period of for example 30 minutes could be added and this can be seen as an integral part of the languages allocation.

There have been numerous OBE INFO newsletters setting out suggested timetables. These times have actually not changed with the introduction of an Outcomes Based approach but in fact have been required since 1996 and before. Schools must use these times for their timetables for 2005 without fail. Such deviation from policy will no longer be tolerated.

OUTCOMES BASED EDUCATION

The attitude towards OBE seems to have become more positive across the province. Generally schools are making a whole-hearted effort to implement OBE principles. At some sites wonderful work is being done.

It was heart-warming to arrive at Tlhabaki Intermediate School in Sediba village (20 kms from Excelsior and 30 kms from Thaba 'Nchu in the Motheo District – truly far from the madding crowd only accessible by means of poor gravel roads) and see excellent work being done in OBE.

A grade 7 class was busy with truly resource-based learning with newspapers brought from home by the educator as well as using the Freedom Fighter series that was given to all schools during 2003. The grade 2 class was busy learning by doing, using as a resource the classroom and objects in the classroom – they were learning how to identify different shapes.

In both of these classrooms, the learners were so involved in their tasks that our visit was altogether incidental – they scarcely noticed us.

In Kroonheuwel Primary School (Kroonstad, Northern Free State District), reading skills of the learners are very carefully monitored from Grade 1 onward, problems diagnosed and remedial action taken for every learner that struggles. This is so thoroughly done (with the help of electronic programmes) that the school can truly claim that no learner leaves them being unable to read, write and comprehend.

RESOURCES

In the examples experienced of good curriculum in action, we saw examples of the prominent and important part that has to be played by resources. However, this aspect is neglected in too many places.

It was wonderfully encouraging to see that at Kwetlisong Secondary School (in Petrus Steyn, Thabo Mofutsanyana District) a dedicated educator is helping the principal create a resource centre from an old classroom, with work stations for computers the school does not yet have. Unwanted wood found in the neighbourhood is being used and parent volunteers are assisting as well as unemployed members of the community. This resource classroom will also house the library of the school.

At Letsibolo Primary School (Wesselsbron, Lejweleputswa) a small storeroom has been carefully and beautifully arranged as a fully functional small school library. It is very well patronised by the learners. This school demonstrates how much can be done with very little.

It is essential that schools pay really serious attention to the books they have in their possession. Books are precious and more important than ever in the resource hungry curriculum we have now.

It is no excuse for a school to say that there is no one on the staff who is allocated the function of a librarian – surely someone on the staff loves books, surely someone on the staff can be released daily from 13.30 to 15.00 to arrange and care for the few resources the school may have, surely anyone can see that to leave books lying in piles on the ground unattended and covered in dust is nothing short of criminal!

DROP OUT RATE IN FET

At FET level, many schools show a great discrepancy between the pass rate at Grade 12 level as opposed to Grades 10 and 11. Sometimes the pass rates for Grades 10 and 11 are as low as 30 - 40% while the pass rate at Grade 12 level is almost at the 100% mark. This is very worrying and clearly not educationally sound.

In saying this, no-one is suggesting that learners should be passed simply for the sake of passing them. However, if this situation arises at a particular school, it is indicative of problems in the learning and teaching at that school. The personnel should sit down together and analyse what they need to do to correct the situation. At all really consistently successful schools in the province, this problem does not exist. The question should be asked 'Why does this problem exist at my school?' This would logically be followed by another question: 'What should we as a school do to rectify this problem?' If a problem is properly analysed, a solution can be found. Consider the table on the next page that illustrates the problem.

SCHOOL ONE:

Grade 10 500 learners 40% pass rate - 200 learners continue into Grade 11
Grade 11 200 learners 50% pass rate - 100 learners continue into Grade 12
Grade 12 100 learners 100% pass rate

100 learners achieve a Senior Certificate

OUTPUT FROM GRADE 10 - GRADE 12 - 20% of the original 500 learners.

SCHOOL TWO:

Grade 10 500 learners 70% pass rate - 350 learners continue into Grade 11
Grade 11 350 learners 70% pass rate - 245 learners continue into Grade 12
Grade 12 245 learners 60% pass rate

147 learners achieve a Senior Certificate

OUTPUT FROM GRADE 10 - GRADE 12 - 29% of the original 500 learners - still too few but considerably better than school one.

It is clear from the example above that the situation in school two is educationally far sounder than in school one, but school one is the school that impresses because of the 100% pass rate in Grade 12. It is essential that we adjust our thinking to approach the FET phase as a whole when assessing the effectiveness of a school – thereby school two should be seen as a more successful school than school one as it has a better output from Grade 10 to Grade 12 than school one. All school one is doing is contributing significantly to the unemployment rate in its particular community.

The dropout rate as set out above has a further serious consequence. A wide subject choice as is required for 500 Grade 10 learners is unsuitable for only 100 Grade 12 learners. The consequence of this is that Grade 12 classes are very small, causing Grade 10 classes to be very large. This increases the likelihood of bad results in Grade 10 and the problem as set out above is perpetuated.

CHOICE OF GRADES IN FET

It is absolutely essential that all subjects that have higher and standard grades should be offered in Grade 10 to all learners on the higher grade so that every learner has a fair chance to see whether he or she can cope on the highest grade possible.

Learners may be advised to take a subject on SG but the decision may not be made for them nor may they not even be offered the choice.

USE OF ENGLISH AS LANGUAGE OF LEARNING AND TEACHING FROM GRADE 4

As we know, it is policy that learners be taught in their mother tongue in the Foundation Phase at least. It has become common practice to change over to English as Language of Learning and Teaching from Grade 4 onwards, although this is not policy. Policy recommends the use of mother tongue for as long as practically possible and further suggests that if there is to be a change to English it should happen gradually and not necessarily in all Learning Areas.

However, at many schools there is a consistent progression rate through the Foundation Phase, but when the learners reach Grade 4, there is a sudden and sometimes sharp drop in the progression rate. When asked why this is so, the answer given by schools is that the learners struggle to cope with the change to English and therefore are retained in Grade 4.

This is an altogether unacceptable perspective for two reasons:

1. The responsibility for the smooth and seamless change over to a new LoLT is that of the school and the learners cannot be penalised for it. If the learner is not yet ready for being taught in another language, the other language should be introduced gradually.

The gradual introduction of a new LoLT can happen as follows:

- * Proper attention is given to the First Additional Language from Grade 2 onwards (English in this case - soon to become the LoLT).
- * Not all learning programmes in Grade 4 need to be taught through the medium of English.
- * When assessment is done, either the mother tongue, or English and the mother tongue, can be used in the setting of questions. It is a principle of OBE that the learner must clearly understand what is expected.
- * Code switching is used regularly.

While a learner struggles with the Language of Learning and Teaching, extra remedial help must be given and the LoLT be considered a temporary barrier to effective learning and treated as such.

2. As far as progression is concerned, a learner will be expected to progress from Grade 4 to Grade 5 except when exceptional circumstances apply. Adaptation to a new LoLT cannot be seen as a problem emanating from the learner - the school should solve the problem to the benefit of the learner. The learner still has two more years to demonstrate the Learning Outcomes and should by and large be progressing with his or her age cohort. Repetition of Grade 4 will not often be to the benefit of the learner - when this is necessary, the usual procedures must be followed of involving remedial specialists and learning facilitators and consulting with the parents.

Thus under very few circumstances would one expect the progression rate in Grade 4 to be lower than the progression rate in Grade 3 or Grade 5.

DEALING WITH PROGRESSION IN GRADE 8

Schools should remember that Grade 8 is already part of Outcomes Based Assessment and therefore should be dealt with in terms of progression rather than in terms of failing / promotion. Grade 8 has PROGRESSION GUIDELINES while Grade 9 has PROMOTION REQUIREMENTS. The difference between these two concepts should be clearly understood. When applying Progression Guidelines, learners will remain in a grade for a second year only when it is clearly in their interests and the consequences of retention have been thoroughly considered and examined.

When dealing with Promotion Requirements, it is much more straightforward - if the learner does not meet the requirements as set out in national and provincial policy, he or she does not get promoted from GET to FET (in this case) and from 2005, will not receive the GETC.

It must be stated that across the province, it would seem that schools offering OBE up to Grade 7 are dealing well with progression. Probably the problems now being experienced with Grade 8 will be cleared up next year when more OBE training is done for the implementation of the Senior Phase.

**PLEASE CONTACT 0832981119 OR (051) 4054852 IF
YOU HAVE ANY QUERIES RELATING TO
CURRICULUM ISSUES.**

