New language policy for 2014

Department of Basic Education will introduce African languages to syllabus starting next year

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A NEW school language policy is on the cards for next year with a planned gradual phase-in of a mandatory African language to supplement English.

Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga said during her national council of provinces policy debate last month that “A new policy will come into effect in 2014, mandating the learning of an African language in all schools. This builds on work done to improve competencies in African languages.”

Motshekga’s spokesperson, Hope Mokgathe, says all schools that do not have an African language in their school language policy will have to introduce “incrementally from 2014 in Grade R and 1 the learning of an African language as another first additional language.”

“The Language in Education Policy promotes additive multilingualism, which means that pupils come to school knowing their mother tongue and are taught other languages incrementally across the different grades in school,” Mokgathe said.

Research by the department found that many schools’ language policies, which are determined by their school governing bodies (SGBs), meant English and Afrikaans received preference at the expense of African languages.

“Language selection does not promote the African languages of the pupil body in many schools. They are forced to learn English and Afrikaans instead,” Mokgathe said. “Many pupils who do not speak an African language are still leaving the schooling system having never been taught an African language.”

Promoting equality of language in schools was not only about giving pupils the opportunity to excel at schooling in their formative years, but about promoting social cohesion, she said.

Mxolisi Zwane, acting CEO of the Pan South African Language Board, agreed. “We can only be satisfied once we are a nation that acts intentionally about its mother languages while promoting multilingualism, because language is a fundamental human rights issue,” he said.

Zwane praised the department for the policy decision saying it was commendable that South Africa was making strides in language rights issues.

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