

**SPEECH BY THE MEC FOR EDUCATION, MS LINDI MASINA,
ON THE OCCASION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL OUTREACH
PROGRAMME AND PREMIER'S IMBIZO WITH EARLY CHILDHOOD
DEVELOPMENT STAKEHOLDERS' ENGAGEMENT: 19 MARCH 2026**

Programme Director and Head: Education, **Mrs. Lucy Moyane**

Member of the Mayoral Committee

Members of Senior Management

Nkangala District Director, **Mr. DM Maja**

Members of the District Management Team

Leaders of the Early Childhood Development Sector,

Representatives of Non-Governmental Organizations,

Distinguished Stakeholders,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Afternoon, Sanibonani

It is a privilege to stand before you today as we gather under the banner of the Executive Council Outreach Programme and the Premier's Imbizo. We are truly grateful that you made it to this meeting and know that your presence is not taken for granted.

Today, we have convened a family meeting to make an honest reflection on the milestones, shortcomings and plans for this important sector.

We are indeed, meeting to hear from you about the challenges that you are experiencing and what you are suggesting to improve the delivery of Early Childhood Development Programmes in this District and Province.

There are currently **2,895** Early Childhood Development (ECD) Centres operating across Mpumalanga.

The Department has increased funding to strengthen ECD service delivery. A subsidy of **R24 per child** per day is provided for 22 days per month for center-based programmers.

In addition, non-center-based programmers receive an increased allocation of **R9 per child**.

Through these interventions, more than **75,000** children from disadvantaged communities across the province are currently benefiting from ECD subsidies.

Over the past few years, we have made commendable strides in stabilizing the Early Childhood Development sector.

- The migration of the ECD function to the Department of Basic Education has begun to yield positive results.
- We are steadily building a more coordinated, better regulated, and increasingly responsive system.
- We have seen improvements in formalization and support of ECD centres,
- We are noting increased access to learning opportunities for young children,
- Indeed, we are encouraged by the enhanced collaboration between government and civil society,
- And growing awareness among communities about the importance of early learning.

These gains are the result of deliberate, intentional policy choices, collective effort and your commitment.

All of us in this hall, do concur that Early Childhood Development is the foundation upon which all future learning, development, and success are built.

Research consistently confirms that the first five years of a child's life are the most critical for cognitive, emotional, and social development. The truth is that, when we invest in ECD are shaping the future workforce, leadership, and social fabric of our nation.

In his recent State of the Nation Address, President Cyril Ramaphosa emphasized government's commitment to expanding access to quality Early Childhood Development.

The President stressed that no child should be left behind, and that ECD remains central to breaking the cycle of poverty and inequality.

This vision is firmly aligned with the National Development Plan 2030, which

calls for universal access to quality early childhood education and the strengthening of systems that support child development from birth.

Our policy imperatives as a department are therefore clear:

- To expand equitable access to ECD services,
- To improve the quality of provisioning,
- To professionalize the ECD workforce, and
- To ensure that all centres operate within a regulated and supportive framework.

As we look ahead to the 2026/27 financial year, our Departmental Annual Performance Plan sets out a bold and actionable Programme. Key priorities include:

We therefore call upon all stakeholders to work closely with the Department, share experiences, expertise, and resources where possible.

The Department established the Early Childhood Development Institute (ECDI) in 2021 as part of its commitment to strengthening the capacity of practitioners in the sector.

Following its establishment, the Institute applied to the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) for accreditation to offer a Skills Development Programme (SDP). The QCTO, a statutory body established in terms of the Skills Development Act (Act 97 of 1998), approved the accreditation of the ECDI in November 2022.

The accredited qualification is the *Occupational Certificate: Early Childhood Development* at NQF Level 4.

Currently, **4,065** practitioners in the province hold qualifications below NQF Level 4 and require upgrading.

To date, **1,988** practitioners have successfully been upgraded to NQF Level 4 through this Programme.

The qualifications equip practitioners with the necessary competencies to:

We need to take advantage of this Institute and be deliberate to build a unified front in advancing the interests of our children. ***It is all in our hands.***

Together, we can create a system that is responsive, resilient, and rooted in the needs of our communities.

A key pillar of our work going forward is the intensification of the Bana Pele Registration Campaign.

This campaign is about ensuring that every ECD centres operate within a legal and supportive framework.

It is about ensuring that children are cared for in safe and conducive environments,

It is to make it our responsibility to support, capacitate and show love to our practitioners.

Let us all join hands and encourage all unregistered centres to come forward and work with us in the best interest of our children.

The Department stands ready to support you through the registration process.

Let us all champion the message: ***“Bana Pele – Children First.”***

As we move forward, let us remember that the work we do today will echo for generations.

Let us deepen our collaboration, strengthen our resolve, And remain guided by the principle that every child deserves a fair start in life.

The future of Mpumalanga is in the small hands we nurture today, the young minds we inspire, and the opportunities we create.

In closing, let us continue to build an Early Childhood Development sector that is inclusive, equitable, and transformative.

Let us act with urgency, with unity, and with purpose.

And let us never forget that when we invest in our children, we invest in the very soul of our province and the promise of our nation.

Once again, thank you for attending this meeting, I am looking forward to hearing from you how best we can improve the delivery of ECD in our Province- *The Place of the Rising Sun.*

