



22 October 2010

## **BRIEFING AND DISCUSSION DOCUMENT FOR THE MEETING WITH THE MINISTER OF BASIC EDUCATION: MS A MOTSHEKGA AND CaSPA (CATHOLIC SCHOOLS PROPRIETORS' ASSOCIATION)**

### **Part 1: Background, Values and Identity of Catholic Schooling**

The Catholic Church, through its mission in Catholic schools, seeks to serve and participate fully as a meaningful partner in the ongoing development of South African society. This document highlights the significance of Catholic education which is committed to the development of the whole human person, as well as considering the challenges faced. The two main structures obtaining in the Catholic education network are the Catholic Institute of Education (CIE), which is responsible for the implementation of policy and for service provision, and the Catholic Schools' Proprietors' Association (CaSPA) which is responsible for vision and policy.

We face many obstacles. Our country is still characterised by inequality and poverty. Many of the most vulnerable learners still achieve poorly, and deprivation does not make life easy. Catholic schools are challenged to be centres of care - to go beyond the walls of the classroom and to connect with the social worlds of the children they serve.

#### **1.1 The Catholic Church's contribution to education in South Africa**

Our schools have continued to share responsibility for the social and cultural development of different communities, participating in their joys and hopes, their sufferings and difficulties, in their efforts to achieve genuine human progress.

The involvement of the Catholic Church in formal education in South Africa dates back to 1849 when the Missionary Sisters of the Assumption opened the first Catholic school for white settler children in Grahamstown.

By 1953 there were approximately 688 state-aided and 130 unaided schools, a number of teacher training colleges and special schools, providing formal education for 15% of the African population in school at the time.

The Bantu Education Act of 1953 presented a major challenge to our mission in education. This was true for all church schools, not only those operated by the Catholic church. The Act intended to bring the education of the African majority under state control, to serve the purposes of apartheid. Church authorities resisted this attempt and raised money to keep as many of the schools as possible operating as private schools outside the sphere of control of the Bantu Education authorities. Despite these efforts, the 1950s and 1960s saw the closure of many Catholic schools as a result of financial pressure. Some schools were 'handed over' to the state when the church could no longer afford to keep them operating.

Teacher training was also brought under state control and only African teachers who qualified in Bantu Education teacher training institutions could be employed as teachers in state schools for African children. This forced the churches out of teacher training for African teachers.

In 1976, the Catholic Church led the way in opening what were then private schools for white children, to all race groups. This move was the first step towards integration of firstly the private schools and ultimately the entire Catholic education system in South Africa. The state imposed a quota system which made sure that White private schools would not have more than 10% Black children as part of their enrolment. When the Church defied the racial quota system in the 1980s, subsidies to Catholic private schools were cut back drastically, precipitating financial crisis for many into the early 1990s.

With the advent of democracy and the legislative integration of education, *Public Schools on Private Property* were provided for in the South African Schools Act of 1996. The Act guaranteed the recognition of the distinctive religious character of those schools where the property was owned by religious organisations. The required agreements between the owners of the property and the Member of the Executive Council responsible for education in each province recognised both the distinctive religious character and the manner in which it was to be maintained. An instrument to appraise the distinctive Catholic character of schools was developed and is required by owners to monitor the religious dimension of all schools.

## **1.2 Cultural identity of the Catholic school**

Our Catholic schools are schools for all, with special attention to those who are most

vulnerable. In the past, the establishment of our schools arose out of the needs of the socially and economically disadvantaged. Many of our schools have their origin in a deep concern for the education of children and young people left to their own devices and deprived of any form of schooling. In parts of our country, even today, material poverty prevents many children from having access to formal education and adequate human and Christian formation.

The nature of our schools expresses the synthesis between culture and faith. The endeavour to interweave reason and faith brings forth a broad catholic vision of the world, of life, of culture and of history.

In our schools there is no separation between time for learning and time for formation, between acquiring notions and growing in wisdom. The various school subjects present knowledge to be attained, together with values to be acquired and truths to be discovered. This approach demands an atmosphere characterised by the search for truth, in which competent, convinced and coherent teachers may be a reflection of the one Teacher.

The school curriculum includes a substantial Religious Education programme - a programme which is life-centred, broad, and multi-faceted, encompassing aspects of personal growth as well as areas of explicitly religious exploration. The programme is rooted in the Catholic tradition, but the scope of this accommodates others from similar Christian tradition, while those from other faith traditions (e.g. Islam) are welcomed to participate in ways that nurture their own spiritual development.

We also express our identity and ideals through worship: key events and themes are celebrated, and prayer is built into the rhythm of school life. The quality of participation varies, naturally, with the faith-life of the individual learner. A complementary expression of the school's identity is its solidarity with the disadvantaged. In poorer communities, this takes the form of responding wherever possible to local needs, while in more fortunate communities solidarity takes the form of concrete concern and outreach rooted in a curriculum which is well aware of local conditions.

### **1.3 Challenges and difficulties**

What distinguished Catholic education in the past, and still does today, was the commitment of so many men and women, who saw their teaching as a mission and true calling. Catholic schools play an important pastoral role, in caring also for the broader home context of the child. Our schools are confronted with children and young people who experience the difficulties of the present time.

The threat of HIV/Aids presents a key challenge for our schools. The high rate of infection of young people in South Africa, amongst the highest in the world, manifests itself in increasing mortality of children and young people. Parent mortality weakens families and our schools have to cope with increasing numbers of children who have lost the material and emotional support they may have received from parents.

Our schools are challenged as communities to increase commitment in combating the threat that HIV/Aids poses to the fabric of our society. We need to find and provide models for responding to the effects of HIV/Aids in our education system and for community-based care and support of children who live with and are affected by HIV/Aids. The Catholic Schools' network is actively engaged in this struggle.

The reality of large-scale poverty and hunger in many parts of our country, urban deterioration and the rise in crime also challenge our schools. The unacceptably high levels of violent crime experienced in South Africa spill over into our schools and playgrounds, with reports of children being assaulted by classmates on school property.

Finance is a source of further difficulty, which is felt more acutely where government support is reduced. This places a heavy financial burden on families who choose to send their children to Catholic schools and constitutes a serious threat to the survival of the schools themselves. Moreover, such financial strain impacts on the recruitment and retention of teachers and can also result in the exclusion of those who cannot afford to pay. This may lead to a selection according to means which deprives the Catholic school of one of its distinguishing features, to be a school for all.

#### **1.4 The Catholic school at the service of society**

Our schools cannot be considered separately from other schools, but in relation to the world of politics, economy, culture and society as a whole. Our schools need to be a catalyst for other schools, an example of the Church community's concern for education. In this way the Catholic school's public role is clearly demonstrated. Our schools need to contribute to the building of a new South Africa.

In virtually every message from the Bishops to the Catholic community since 1993, the call to collaboration has rung loud and clear. Collaboration among all those who have a stake in our schools is essential if they are to continue to have a significant impact on society. Some practical examples of collaboration already exist. Deeds of Agreement established between the State and *Public Schools on Private Property* give these schools legal status and a measure of State support; the Deed also entitles the schools to retain their Catholic character and ethos. These Deeds have led to the forging of strong links between the owners of the schools and the School Governing Bodies that govern them.

Our schools are therefore not private initiatives, but an expression of the reality of the Church, having by our very nature a public character. We fulfil a service of public usefulness and, although clearly and decidedly formed in the perspective of the Catholic faith, our schools are not reserved for Catholics. Catholic schools are open to all those who appreciate and share our vision. This dimension of openness is particularly evident in a country like ours where we have promoted civil progress and human development without discrimination.

Catholic schools, like other public and independent schools, fulfil a public role. Our presence guarantees cultural and educational pluralism and, above all, the freedom and right of families to see that their children receive the education they desire for them.

The missionaries often challenged the conventional wisdom of the day. They saw beyond the present. Today we are called to see beyond the current reality and make roads where no road has been. Today we are called to continue the mission of the Church. We are called to offer a quality education that meets the physical, intellectual, moral, spiritual and social needs of learners and inspires them to live the values taught by Jesus. And we are committed to this.

*Proposal:*

*The Catholic education network, most especially CaSPA and CIE are open and eager to:*

- *Explore with Government new and cost-effective ways of delivering basic education that is respectful of the child and in the interests of the nation (please see proposals that follow)*
- *Put our many years of experience and commitment at the service of pilot projects in regard to the above*
- *Manage the government funding that would be necessary for such pilot education projects*
  - *with a high and proven level of accountability*
  - *with our skills in optimising scarce resources*
- *Negotiate the autonomies necessary to make such projects effective.*

## **1.5 What does the Catholic network look like today? (2009 schools profile)**

355 schools in nine provinces

174 543 children:

- 92 795 girls
- 81 748 boys

7 240 teachers

2 461 non-teaching staff

Faith of children:

- 28% Catholic
- 72% other faiths

Race of children:

- 90% Black
- 10% White.

Schools are owned or situated on property owned by a total of 24 dioceses and 41 religious orders.

32.86% of all Catholic schools are in KwaZulu-Natal, 87.9% of these being public schools on private property. Gauteng follows with 15.01% of Catholic schools with 84% of these as independent schools, then Eastern Cape with 14.45% and of these approximately 84.3% are public. 12.75% of Catholic schools are in the Western Cape. The Free State, North West and Northern Cape provinces have 6.23%, 5.38% and 5.95% of Catholic schools respectively. Limpopo has 4.82% of Catholic schools and Mpumalanga 2.55% with only 9 schools.

About 80% of the schools are rural or situated in townships and serve black communities. The rest are suburban and integrated or black.

Catholic schools serve the entire range of socio-economic sub-sectors of South African society. In 2007, 60 schools charged no fees (16.99%), 48 schools (13.59%) charged fees of up to R50 per year with a further 11.04% charging fees between R50 and R100 per year. 18.69% of Catholic schools charge annual school fees between R100 and R500, and a total of 69.69% of all Catholic schools charge fees of R1000 or less per year. Only 16.73% of schools charge fees above R6000 per year, considered to be the middle income fee level in South Africa.

The physical infrastructure and facilities of schools range from run-down, totally inadequate rural facilities with sometimes close to 55 learners in a classroom; through simple, well maintained albeit simply equipped rural, township and suburban schools; to very well maintained and well equipped schools all over the country.

Catholic schools have a reputation for being centres of excellence, with the 101 schools offering matric maintaining a 83.1% senior certificate pass (2009), above the provincial and national averages. We accept, however, that there are Catholic schools in which the quality of education provided as well as the infrastructure requires attention.

## **Part 2: Current challenges in education**

### **2.1 Need for determined leadership and honest appraisal**

It is not an exaggeration to say that schooling in South Africa is in a state of deep crisis. Teachers are angry, learners are angry and the community is angry. Most of the news coming out of schools is negative, and the spiral of negativity is accelerating. The NSC results for 2010 are likely to deepen the lack of confidence.

Government urgently need to give determined, positive leadership. The country needs to know that current conditions are not acceptable and change will come. This means standing firm on the minimum standards of performance, but being flexible about the options for delivery. A range of stakeholders are standing ready to bring their energies to bear to help improve schooling, but lack the mandate to work with public schools as currently structured. Urgent consideration should be given to facilitating the re-introduction and extension in number of “public schools on private property” and new models of partnership where private resources can be deployed to achieve agreed standards of performance.

*Proposal:*

*That Government provide funds for one new school per province, to be established under the auspices of the Catholic Church. The model of schooling could be creative and innovative, discerned with the target community, and provide substantial research for improving delivery models. The Catholic church would facilitate the necessary grass-roots community discernment, and the target groups would in all instances be those in most need of quality education. This funding would include infrastructure and running costs, and the Church would negotiate the necessary autonomies and accountabilities with the Department of Education.*

## **2.2 Back to basics**

We congratulate you, Minister on this welcome message as is the cutting of many of the unnecessary administrative burdens on teachers. Proposed curriculum change should be put on hold and attention focused on getting functional classrooms where the basics of learning and teaching take place. The commitments at Polokwane to getting teachers in classrooms, on time and teaching need to be given centre stage. Lesson plans, homework and class tests need to be re-introduced as fundamental classroom activities.

The Umalusi reports given to the Minister each year reveal just how little effective teaching of any kind is taking place. The raw (unadjusted scores) in key subjects expose the extremely limited knowledge base with which the average learner enters the NSC examinations. The “real” pass rate is far worse than generally acknowledged and needs to be addressed as the country’s top priority.

## **2.3 Triage**

The system has enough data to be able to differentiate between individual schools and group them into performance categories. Steadily performing schools should be acknowledged as such and given greater autonomy in managing their own affairs with limited departmental oversight. Schools at risk should receive a specific package of support and dysfunctional schools should be put “under administration” in all provinces.

The argument that schools cannot be held accountable until they are properly resourced needs to be addressed. Government should identify and commit to providing a minimum level of resources through which a minimum level of learner performance can be achieved. Literacy and numeracy levels as recorded through the systemic assessments at grades 3, 6 and 9 can provide the instruments to assess individual school performance and set realistic improvement targets. Energy can then be focused on securing the basics.

## **2.4 Teacher identity and commitment**

There is an urgent need to re-professionalise the teaching profession and to improve the status of teachers in the community. Teachers need to be energised to make a contribution to the growth of our nation. There is also need to improve the morale and motivation of teachers, as well as to find means of improving performance and enhancing responsibility.

### *Proposal:*

- *That Church and Government collaborate to establish of a high-quality, values-based teacher training college under the auspices of the Catholic Church in a public-private partnership.*
- *That we explore launching a campaign, led by the faith-based communities, that commits our schools to a basic set of service delivery promises (a social contract) and that we invite all school communities to join us.*

## **2.5 Schooling: an essential focus of national urgency**

Government has been concerned to reform schooling and tackle systemic weaknesses for the past 15 years. Despite good intentions, standards have declined and knowledge gaps grown wider. Very little of the restructuring has “stuck”. Performance management is core to the success of a “back-to-basics” campaign, yet it cannot be implemented because of non-educational agendas. As a result, formal accountability by teachers, district officials and education managers for their primary responsibilities has all but disappeared and little or no discipline seems to be applied. Every year the country is told it will get better and it only seems to get worse.

A fundamental problem is that there are too many different interests at play within the system. There is no alignment between national educational priorities and provincial/district resources. Core national programmes suffer from inconsistent and patchy delivery. Teacher strikes have been especially debilitating and look set to continue. In classrooms across the country, union opposition prevents the introduction of urgently needed improvements.

Consideration should be given to declaring the equivalent of a state of emergency in schooling and setting aside the next 5 years to use the emergency powers of all organs of state in getting proper foundations of teaching and learning in place. Critical in this

is the de-politicisation of education, together with unequivocal focus on the child, on obviating the waste and misuse of funds in our corruption-ridden society, and on the needs of South Africa.

## **Part 3: Curriculum challenges**

### **3.1 New Curriculum and Assessment Statements**

Last year we welcomed your efforts, Minister Motshekga, to simplify the curriculum and provide more guidance to teachers. However, after examining the much anticipated Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements, we are very concerned that these are inconsistent and patchy. We are also concerned that in spite of an extension there was very little time available for informed public comment.

Each of the subject documents opens with background and overview sections and provides the general aims of the curriculum. The document explains the commitment to social transformation and to fostering critical thinking. The commitment to progression from grade to grade and to the development of more complex knowledge is also highlighted. However, these elements are missing in most of the draft curriculum documents, and this may lead to confusion and disparities across subjects.

A key aim of producing the new documents was to provide more specific guidance for teachers. Teachers need to know what the level of difficulty is and how best to prepare learners for exams. This is not provided in the documents. The guidance across subjects is very varied and the cognitive challenge dimension is only taken note of in some subject documents. The organising principles of the particular curriculum are not spelled out.

The curriculum documents themselves are all very different and there has been no attempt to standardise these documents. It is essential to provide teachers with guidance on how to work with the new documents. The key concepts, depth, scope and range need to be specified in each of the documents and more guidance needs to be provided on levels of cognitive challenge.

The guidance offered on assessment varies from subject to subject. Some documents offer broad guidelines while others are more specific. It is regrettable that so little use has been made of assessment examples in the documents.

Finally, we are concerned that there is very little time to finalise these documents before next year, and to prepare teachers to implement the changes. This could once again lead to further teacher confusion and anxiety (*a comprehensive submission has already been prepared and submitted on the curriculum documents*).

### **3.2 Religion in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement**

Religion receives a very mixed but, on the whole, marginal treatment in the new curriculum proposals. In addition, there is little consistency and coherence in the way it is presented in the documents.

There is no specific reference to religious realities in Foundation Phase Life Skills. There are themes in a newly named area, Beginning Knowledge that could lend themselves to integration with religion in the hands of a skilled, sensitive and committed teacher. However, to all intents and purposes, religion is not addressed. In the Intermediate Phase a detailed programme of Religion Education of one hour per week is proposed. In the Senior Phase Religion retreats again almost entirely into the shadows. One hour per year is given to random religious topics under the rubric 'Constitutional rights and responsibilities'. In the FET Phase religion gets a small look in of 1, 2, or 3 hours in the year depending on grade, this time under the rubric 'Democracy and human rights' in Life Orientation.

The proposed Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements for Life Skills and Life Orientation are, in our opinion, no improvement on the RNCS (2002) which was consistent in its treatment of religion in Life Orientation, even though it was lacking in depth and appeal to the spiritual dimension of the human person. The treatment of religion in the National Curriculum needs a clearly articulated rationale and coherent progression through the phases.

## **Part 4: Challenges facing Catholic Schools**

### **4.1 Catholic Public Schools on Private Property**

#### **4.1.1 The appointment of principals and teachers**

The Deed of Agreement enables the participation of the owner or the owner's representative in all phases of the legislated process for the appointment of personnel at Catholic schools. Your endorsement of *Partnership for the Common Good*, which summarises the provisions of the Deed of Agreement, is proving to be of great support and assistance.

Problems arise when local education officials and union representatives object to this involvement without a clear understanding of Section 14 and 57 of the Deed of Agreement. The role of unions in the appointment process is problematic. They go beyond their role as observers and sometimes disturb the appointment process and delay appointments. This is particularly true when a promotional post is at stake. Disputes over appointments need to be dealt with more speedily as in some cases acting principals are in place for years. The Catholic office in the Eastern region of the Eastern Cape has observed lengthy delays in appointment of teachers when a teacher resigns or dies.

SGBs in rural areas are often faced with the challenge of parent members who through lack of formal education sometimes feel inferior to others on the governing body. This has led to them being exploited, manipulated and even intimidated by other members when it comes to appointments.

The CIE is committed to the development of the School Governing Body's understanding of their roles and responsibilities and to educate them on the requirements of the deed of agreement as well as to affirm their ability to govern the school.

#### **4.1.2 Redeployment of teachers**

While understanding the post provisioning agreements and constraints facing provincial government, the redeployment of teachers causes problems for Catholic schools on two fronts.

The Catholic service network, through its programmes in schools, develops the competency and capacity of school leadership and educators. When the people are redeployed the school loses skilled personnel often with little notice.

The second problem arises when people are redeployed to Catholic schools without the required skills for the post. Some claim that because they were seconded and did not choose to go to a Catholic school they have no responsibility to uphold and respect the distinctive Catholic character.

#### **4.1.3 Dealing with principals who do not perform their duties**

There has been some success in dealing with ineffective principals in certain provinces through close collaboration with district officials. Generally however, labour legislation and policy and the difficulties of replacing principals, make it extremely difficult for a school to remove a principal who is not performing his/her duties. This has an effect on the whole school and lowers the morale of educators. The most serious effect is the decline in the quality of teaching and learning. A clear, simple understanding of how to deal with this problem should be disseminated to all stakeholders with education officials having definite timelines to deal with this.

#### **4.1.4 The problems of quintile allocation to schools**

Catholic schools face the same difficulties with quintile allocations as do other public schools. It is well documented that schools are placed in quintiles that can be challenged, yet the policy and administration of the norms does not provide clarity to schools on how to challenge their poverty scores. In some instances, neighbouring schools are at opposite ends of the funding allocation with one being a quintile 1 school and the other at quintile 5.

There is an additional problem, where schools in quintile 1 are reclassified into the highest quintile and find their funding changed. These schools are rated as the poorest

in one year and are rated amongst the richest the next year. This also makes it difficult for schools to budget and plan appropriately.

Schools become disheartened when their concerns are not addressed and their situation deteriorates. The following are examples of the type of problem encountered.

Marymount High School in Uitenhage is situated on the edge of town. The learners come from the local township and informal settlements nearby. This school has been classified in quintile 5 because of its geographical location. St Ignatius in Addo is a very poor school in the Sunday's River Valley where most parents are seasonal fruit workers and it is not classified as quintile 1.

Other problems with quintile allocations took place when all quintile 3 schools became no-fee schools. Schools which charged fees and whose parents were accustomed to paying fees have found themselves in the position where the no-fee allocation fails to match what they would have received in school fees. While some of these have been resolved at provincial level, some schools face a less resourced future.

It must be noted that schools and local Catholic offices have tried to remedy such situations by applying for reclassification. This is usually unsuccessful due to the lack of clarity on processes which schools can follow to challenge their poverty score.

*Request:*

*That a standardised process be established to deal with quintile reclassification and made known to schools and to local Departmental officials, so that schools can be assisted in the process of changing their poverty score if this is justified.*

#### **4.1.5 Teaching of Religious Education in Catholic Public Schools**

The major challenge faced by schools in this regard is the lack of understanding by school management and education officials of the Deed of Agreement and the right to retain the distinctive Catholic character in providing religious education in terms of paragraph 16 of the National Policy on Religion in Education.

CaSPA through CIE and local Catholic Schools Offices has prioritised efforts to implement the Deed correctly. This has included principal, school management team and staff development, and SGB training.

There is a firm commitment from the Catholic network to work together with the DoE and provincial departments to improve schools and to continue to address issues that hinder this process. The Deed of Agreement booklet you have endorsed, will greatly assist to overcome some of the problems listed here and other interventions can be planned for those not covered by the booklet.

#### **4.1.6 Rentals for State use of Public Schools on Church-owned land**

Owners of Catholic *Public Schools on Private Property* put their schools at the service of the state and of the local community, and rentals in most cases are totally inadequate for the upkeep of the property. Rentals are in no way market-related, and the formula differs from province to province. In some instances no rental is paid at all; or it is so small as to be useless. Of particular concern is that no rental is paid for boarding accommodation.

*Proposal:*

*That the rental for PSPPs be standardised, and set at a reasonable rate; that particular attention be given to rentals for boarding accommodation.*

#### **4.2 Catholic Independent Schools**

We would like to encourage you, Minister, to continue administering public funding to the Independent Sector in a manner that encourages transformation in the Education system while increasing the capacity of schools to accommodate South Africa's learners. In this regard we must recognise the role of the subsidy in the long term sustainability of Independent schools.

Research shows that fees in schools receiving the highest level of subsidies have often been raised because of a lack of capacity of PED's to deliver subsidy payments on time. This causes a problem when a punitive measure exists for these schools which may have had to raise fees through no fault of their own. A loss in the subsidy level affects the poorer schools more than the richer schools that may be more able to manage the change.

We would appreciate the Department of Educations' due consideration for a change in the subsidy levels in order to recognise transformation in South Africa and encourage growth and development in the poorer schools. At the same time richer schools would be given an incentive to drop their fees to increase accessibility as they would stand to benefit more.

*Proposal:*

*That subsidy formulas be overhauled and adjusted to provide particularly low-income Independent Schools with enough State support to continue to provide good quality education.*

## Part 5: Our continued contribution to education

The CIE was established in 1985 as an Associate Body of the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference. The ultimate goal of the CIE is to continue to support and promote quality education for children in Catholic schools in South Africa. CaSPA, the association of Owners, is committed to continuing to contribute to the values-growth, levels of excellence, and social capital of South Africa, through means of education, as we have for the past 150 years.

The CIE and other Catholic service bodies continue to deliver school-based services across the country. Our key programme areas are: Religious and values education – Catholic identity; Policy analysis and advocacy; Leadership and governance formation; Literacy and Numeracy development; Quality assurance; HIV Aids mitigation; Education access for marginalized children; Pastoral care and wellbeing and skills development (aimed at out-of-school youth).

We also support an extensive network of orphans and vulnerable children in our schools and ensure that they access adequate education provision.

### *An example*

#### *Recent innovative work: piloting school-based health screening*

During 2009, CIE surveyed a sample of 18 schools to assess the extent and efficacy of the health care available to them. 100% of the schools surveyed indicated that available services were not adequate and that they would like to receive health screening. All the schools that were surveyed and subsequently assisted are in the poorest and often rural parts of South Africa.

After months of intensive preparation, CIE finally launched its own pilot site on 1 March 2010 in Gauteng, before beginning implementation in Limpopo province. The health screening process was subsequently put into effect from May this year with 2000 children in 30 schools being screened. Schools were spread across the six provinces of Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Free State, Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and North West.

Teams travelled vast distances taking the screening to the schools. Schools were well-prepared for the screening and there were prerequisites for participation. Venues used included a vacant hospital and school halls, the ideal venue. Some departmental officials attended the screening and the time they spent there varied between 10 minutes and a day.

For CIE, the health screening is part of its broader pastoral care work and ongoing work with grade teachers in particular. Broader issues were picked up concerning schools, such as the ethos of the school and the use being made of resources. Other

issues which came up were:

- the state of the environment
- the appearance of learners
- neglected hygiene, serious in some instances
- signs of neglect in children
- children walking long distances to and from school (one child walks 32 kilometres a day)
- poor conditions in boarding schools.

Learning problems were detected in a number of children and where necessary children were referred for expert help. The enterprise fostered excellent and fruitful collaboration between CIE, schools, government departments and service providers. Follow up by CIE and schools is ongoing. A link to the South African Optometric Association provided us with support throughout the project and has enabled children to receive glasses from *SpecSavers*, an intervention which is funded by *SterKinekor*.

CIE was able to link with the Deputy Director at the Health Promotion Unit at the Department of Basic Education, through our mutual participation in the Caring Schools Network.

*Proposal:*

*As a network holding both Public and Independent Schools, and serving all sectors of the community but especially the very poor, the Catholic education network is uniquely positioned. If the above proposals for collaboration between the Catholic Education structures and the Department of Education are to be explored, we propose the setting up of a high-level joint working group comprising members delegated by the Minister, and by CaSPA and CIE. We propose that this working group also be replicated between the Provincial Departments of Education and the Provincial CaSPAs, with the endorsement of the national Minister.*

As the Catholic education network, it is our great desire to continue to work fruitfully, responsibly and collaboratively with our government in the provision of education, particularly to those communities which have been and remain deprived. We wish to put our experience and expertise at the service of South African education.