

2021 - State of PEPPS Address by Executive Head

21-2-2022 to 23-2-2022

Thobela, Goeienaand, Good evening. Welcome to you all. Welcome to the State of PEPPS Address which will hopefully last about 45 minutes.

Carl Jung, the Swiss psychiatrist had the Latin words 'Vocatus atque non vocatus Deus aderit' carved above his door. These words mean, Called or uncalled God is here or Bidden or not bidden, God is present. This is a powerful thought when carefully contemplated since it says that God is always present and whether we are engaged in prayer or any sort of relationship with God, or not. Whether we are in a state of grace or a state of shame and guilt, God is present and we need only call for God's presence to be made tangible to us.

Imperfect as we are, we are God's beloved. We are loved by the universal source infinitely, as only God can truly manage and we are invited to engage in a love relationship with our maker.

Pope Francis in his Christmas message last year stated that Christian Joy is deeply rooted peace and comes from a relationship with God. With this wisdom in our hearts, I encourage us all to seek peace in our lives.

Colossians 3:15

"And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful."

PEPPS's theme for 2022 is 'Attitude of Gratitude'. This theme was chosen with deep praise for the protection and prosperity that have been granted to our school during the most adverse of world circumstances.

Also, in Paul's letter to the Colossians, we are reminded that we are all part of one body. The body works in unison for the greater good of all parts. PEPPS hopes to work together with the pupils and their families to realise success for all.

Let us pray:

Almighty God. Today we all have some difficulties yet we ask that You help us to focus on those aspects of our lives for which we are grateful.

We all share the desire to see the children in our care flourish. Either as parents, as caregivers, as teachers or as support staff, we remain focused on keeping the child at the centre of all that we do. We are humbled by Your generosity to our school and we come before You with thanksgiving. We place into Your hands each child, each staff member, our Board and all of their families. We place the future of our school in Your care.

Amen

Annually, I address the PEPPS community around the third week of February and since it follows close on the heels of the State of the Nation Address, I think of it as a State of PEPPS Address.

What is PEPPS doing? Why are we doing it? How are things going at PEPPS? What is the point of PEPPS?

Our president reminded us in his address that local is lekker and PEPPS remains proudly a Limpopo Lighthouse. We continue to shine as a light of excellent education contrasted against some concerns in national education. We once again boasted a 100% matric pass rate in 2021 and an 84% bachelor pass rate. Although we keep striving to increase our BD pass rate it does compare favourably against the 27% of the province.

And although 67% of Limpopo matrics passed we need to be aware that was out of those who sat the exam. Only approximately half of the Grade 1 cohort from 2010 wrote matric in 2021 as scheduled. Approximately 25% of pupils writing matric in our country offer core maths. Of those, only approximately half pass with more than 40%. In the IEB and PEPPS, approximately 60% of our cohort offers core maths and of them, 100% passed at PEPPS in 2021.

I am not saying these things to bring down national education. Many governments schools produce some excellent results and I believe that the majority of teachers in these schools work incredibly hard against the odds of poor infrastructure, limited funding and inefficient administration. I am sharing this data with you to remind you that there is value in choosing to pay, to statistically advantage your child.

That said, I must stress that you do not pay PEPPS for a pass or an excellent result. You pay for an excellent education to be provided and it remains up to the pupil to do the work that is required and to take full advantage of the educational platform provided.

To those of you in our ECD Schools and Prep schools, **what is the point of me telling you about Polokwane's matric results?** Remember that matric results are not the outcome of 1 year of hard work. They are the culmination of 12-15 years of merit worthy education. All three schools write International Benchmarking Tests, administered by the IEB in Grade 3,6 and 9. All three schools now write common exams for English and Maths in June and November. The point is, that the high standards that result in admirable matric results in Polokwane are the same high standards set in all PEPPS classrooms in Limpopo. Our teams of teachers work collaboratively and with dedication. They share best-practice in order to ensure that every PEPPS pupil from 3-20 years old, in our schools, is set up to harvest success.

In the words of President Ramaphosa, Africa needs to take control of her destiny and at PEPPS we truly endeavour to Create Tomorrow's Leaders by putting the child at the centre of all that we do in our educational choices. The community of PEPPS, like the community of

South Africa, must work together for the people that we serve. Nobody gains by tearing our hard work apart.

And now I must thank our parents who support us in providing an incredible educational offering. I sent out a form in January – Ask Annabel – which gave parents the opportunity to raise concerns or give compliments about how PEPPS operates. We received some thanks for how we handled Covid education and much appreciation was shown for our 2022 theme of Attitude of Gratitude.

I committed to addressing the concerns raised in this speech and I shall do so. However, at this juncture, I want to highlight that out of over 3 000 parents or caregivers who could have responded only 10 concerns were raised and most of them were operational in nature, rather than systemic. This speaks to our community believing in what we do and working with us in our educational mission. We appreciate this.

So what is the point of a PEPPS education?

PEPPS was born in the late 80s in Pretoria and came to Limpopo in the early 90s. We were born before the dismantling of apartheid with the express intention of providing an education to all South Africans that was not Bantu education. Tragically, the government of the day wished to deprive black South Africans of access to learning English, complex mathematics, critical and creative thinking and stimulating sporting and cultural activities. Traditional African cultures were not honoured for their value and dignity. The vision of Patrick Hamilton and a small group of enthusiastic parents saw an idea grow into the amazing schools we have now which offer exactly the opposite of what was presented by the government of that time.

Interestingly, Patrick Hamilton, who now lives in England, visited our schools, after a long absence, last week and was inspired by how the seed he had planted had grown into a mighty oak. This mighty oak has been nurtured by generations of committed Board members as well as dedicated Heads and staff. I pay tribute to all those who have ensured that PEPPS can stand tall in our province and shine light around us from the tops of her branches.

Mr Hamilton told me a story that I had previously heard from other Trustees, but it was powerful to hear it again from his perspective. In order to set up PEPPS in Limpopo, meetings were needed and one evening the Founding Committee met at Professor Errol Tyobeka's house. Patrick had to be smuggled into the township as a white man in apartheid South Africa. During the meeting, a man, who was high on drugs and had a gun, came into the house and on seeing Patrick there shouted how he was going to kill this white oppressor. He had the gun to Patrick's head and one of the ladies at the meeting managed to talk the criminal down and explain that Patrick was actually trying to uplift education for black children. Patrick credits her with saving his life. The other people, who were black and indian, were also in mortal danger for trying to start up a multiracial school. I tell this story to remind us all of the risks that were taken in a politically volatile time in our country to ensure that

excellent education was brought to all. We value all those who had the courage and the foresight to start PEPPS.

Our current Board continue to steer PEPPS towards serving more and more pupils in our province at as affordable a price as possible. I thank them for their wisdom, kindness and support. I am acutely aware of the fact that affordable is a relative term. There are people in our country who pay over R200 000 a year for day schooling their children and some who pay nothing. PEPPS is considered a low to medium fee-paying school.

So, as we are in 2022, PEPPS's Mission is 'PEPPS develops independent, critical and creative thinkers through progressive, holistic education.' We do this in order to realise our Vision which is 'Creating Tomorrow's Leaders.'

What is the point of paying fees?

Last year, approximately R60 million of fees came in from parents. In government grants, PEPPS received about R2 million. We are grateful for the extra R2 million, however, it is clear that fees, not government grants, allow for the service that we offer to be sustained.

Our salary bill alone, for nearly 220 staff, is around R42 million and then our schools have to cover their own utilities, stationery, maintenance, subscriptions, infrastructure and facilities. It is a tight budget to balance. We manage our funds with integrity and no tolerance for waste in order to keep the fees as low as possible while providing an excellent education.

Part of our commitment to all parents is that we work tirelessly to collect the full contractual fee from every family and our outstanding accounts at the end of 2021 amounted to less than 1% of our invoiced total. I commend our finance offices and business manager on this achievement. It allows for our schools to grow.

In the interest of transparency, our staff are all paid in line with salary guidelines that are published annually by the Independent Schools Association of South Africa. This ensures that we are competitive and fair in terms of recruiting quality staff.

In the SONA, our president spoke of the need to reduce red tape and in our fee billing, PEPPS has worked hard at simplifying our fees to a single amount billed each month for 11 months. Almost no 'extras' appear on your account, except for voluntary sport or cultural tours or bus fees. Anyone who takes the time to look at the fee structures of other schools will know that this all-inclusive fee is most unusual. We hope it is appreciated.

Our financial records continue to be audited annually and we continue to receive a clean audit every year. We pride ourselves on being responsible custodians of the money entrusted to us to optimally educate your children.

In line with the Competition Commission expectations, our uniform items are available from two separate suppliers – one on our Polokwane campus and one at Banks Stores in Mokopane. Please help us to keep your child's possessions safe by labelling all of their things. If this is done, we can return lost items to their rightful owners and save waste.

What is the point of all of the building that we have been doing over the last few years?

In the last 18 months, an admin building, 18 classrooms and associated toilets have been built across our campuses. This capital development is costly, but our long term dream is to have all three of our Limpopo campuses catering up to matric with the necessary fields, courts and classrooms. This is to fulfil our mandate of offering our excellent education to as many pupils as possible.

Rome was not built in a day and we ask that families are patient as we steadily grow our buildings and facilities. For example, we are still keen to create more shade when funds become available. I want to also share that we are still in discussions to acquire land in Mankweng to restart serving a community that we have served in the past. The additional land (Plot 2) that we purchased in Polokwane is now fully paid off. We are still paying off some of the buildings recently built. Progress requires investment and virtually all of our money comes from fees.

What is the point of being an Eco-School?

I think we all know that the resources on our planet are finite and every responsible citizen is obliged to behave in a manner that cares for our planet. It is essential that we teach Tomorrow's Leaders to pick up litter that is unsightly; blocks waterways to cause flooding; and pollutes the habitats of plants and animals. It is necessary that Tomorrow's Leaders are acutely aware of the truth that every time they waste electricity they are contributing to climate change and when they waste water they are abusing a scarce resource in our province and our country.

I could go on, however, I think I have made it clear that it is important for PEPPS to prioritise the environment. We are not yet content with our own ecological footprint and we shall keep pressing forward in terms of getting off the grid, conserving paper and other resources as well as eliminating litter. We ask that our parents promote the same earth-friendly agenda and habits at home.

What is the point of PEPPS educating differently?

PEPPS is a pioneering school born of a pioneering desire to offer a better education than most. The last decade or two has seen massive shifts in educational paradigms. Even before Covid forced us onto devices, the integration of technology into the classroom was becoming pervasive in progressive circles. Fourth Industrial Revolution compatible education requires that pupils learn to use digital devices and applications effectively.

Encouraging metacognition and the study of ethics has become in vogue and is important in developing higher-order thinking in children. PEPPS explicitly deals with these issues in Philosophy and Axiology.

Project-Based Learning has gained traction to the extent that Minister Angie Motshekga's most recent speech referred to its implementation across national education. PEPPS has been engaging with this methodology which promotes independent, critical and creative thinking for many years now. We have steadily incorporated Creating Tomorrow, our PBL programme, into all of the grades across all of our schools. PEPPS is ahead of the curve and remains an example that other schools look to for the effective implementation of future trends. Our discipline with dignity approach also sets PEPPS apart, where our pupils are respected in their humanity. In being treated with dignity, we hope and trust that over time, PEPPS pupils will learn to treat others appropriately and kindly.

We explicitly work against bullying in our schools. Bullying is inconveniently pervasive across schools in every village, town and city across every nation in the world. Regrettably, pupils can sometimes be mean to one another and we disapprove of this in the strongest terms. That said, it is important that occasional meanness does not get described as bullying. Bullying is a deeply malicious pattern of behaviour, which is targeted and habitual. These cases need to be dealt with using psychological care and support for both the victim and the perpetrator. At PEPPS, we do our best to confront bullying when we notice it or it is brought to our attention. We need specific details rather than vague references to conduct the necessary investigations to get to the bottom of a specific case.

Cyberbullying is a scourge in our society and we encourage parents to ensure that they know what is happening on their child's device. Phones are really not necessary for children under the age of 12 and phone addiction is a real problem that impacts all areas of a child's life.

I could speak for hours about the importance of phones being locked away from children and teens at night and the importance of sleep. Young people do not have a fully developed frontal lobe and they need the adults in their lives to help them with this type of regulation. I shall leave it there, but I ask that parents set their children up for success by ensuring that they have good sleep hygiene.

The average modern child is insufficiently active and has few interests and hobbies beyond what happens on their screens. Sport and culture are an expectation at PEPPS which holistically develop the child. It is expected that all pupils are involved in some physical activity since this vestibular and cardiovascular stimulation are both statistically linked to better health, happiness and academic results.

The abundance of cultural activities on offer at PEPPS also enrich the minds and souls of our children. The diversity of extra opportunities offered is a privilege available to very few. There is an expectation that all pupils participate.

All of these opportunities are available because our Heads and teaching staff ensure that they are prepared to give progressive lessons and worthwhile extra-curricular activities. Our administration staff ensures that systems allow for good logistics and our cleaning and grounds teams work hard to keep our facilities optimised for effective learning.

Without a doubt, PEPPS's greatest asset is our staff. It is not easy to source such a highly qualified and effective group of people. Ensuring the provision of such a rich educational programme is exhausting and intense. The last two years have called for even more flexibility, development and hard work. I sincerely thank our incredible team for their commitment and enthusiasm in serving our pupils.

What is the point of our digital communication platforms?

PEPPS has selected platforms that are accessible across all devices at any time. These platforms allow for us to recruit parents and caregivers into the support network that sets each pupil up for success without adding to the paper being used or expecting the child to carry messages home.

Remember that every teacher, HOD and Head has a work email address where compliments can be shared and concerns raised. Please raise your issue with the correct person. A problem with a sports practice should be sent to the sports coach, and only if it is not resolved should it reach the extra-curricular coordinator or HOD's desk. Only if that avenue is unhelpful should the concern be raised with the Head of School. The same would be true in an academic concern. The teacher first, then Grade Head or HOD and only then the Head of School.

My role is to oversee philosophy, policies, practices and procedures for the entire organisation. I should only be contacted when a school Head has not helped you to resolve a matter. This should happen very rarely indeed, however, I can be emailed directly if and when appropriate.

When emailing staff, please be respectful of their family time during holidays, weekends and evenings. We shall endeavour to respond within 1-2 working days. In the case of something that urgently needs to be communicated, the office can be phoned and if it is so urgent that it must be addressed out of school hours there is an emergency number that can be found on the website. Please do not use this number unless it is a real emergency.

I urge parents to use the correct channels of communication with the school. We communicate with parents through ADAM, myHomework, Google Classroom and our webpage. We brag using Facebook and Instagram, but these social media platforms are not official communication avenues.

ADAM gives real-time feedback to parents and caregivers about the progress of their child. It tells a story about the academic journey that a child is on. You should be seeing at least one

mark every two weeks coming up for each subject. Often you will see more feedback than this. Our assessment of each pupil is based on a rich tapestry of data, not just one or two tests. ADAM allows a family to keep their finger on the pulse of their child's academic progress. I caution families not to become too upset about every single result. We can all have a bad day or two. Only if a concerning trend starts to unfold should intervention be considered.

Google Classroom and myHomework allow for transparent communication about what is happening in class and what assessments are expected. We do our best to keep these platforms up to date. Should you feel that insufficient information is being shared on these platforms, please email the teacher concerned. It should be current and include all necessary details. If a pupil is unwell or needs to isolate, the digital platforms should allow for that child to stay up to date for a short while.

It is not intended that these platforms serve as a long term online school and every detail of every lesson does not need to be uploaded. Just an overview is required.

The webpage is also a useful communication platform where policies, procedures and practices for all campuses can be sourced.

If any families are having difficulties with the various platforms that we use, the admin offices can assist.

PEPPS continues to encourage families to vaccinate adults and children over 12 in order to protect those that we love against the spreading of Covid, serious disease or death. Please do not send unwell children to school.

Screening before school is no longer necessary and pupils will be able to go straight to registration classes each morning without delay.

What is the point of insisting that pupils are dropped and collected inside our school gates?

Recent stories in the media remind us that children are vulnerable. They are more vulnerable waiting outside the school gates than inside. We want to keep our children safe and this is best achieved by caring for them inside our campus fences. If something unfortunate were to happen outside the school, the school would be blamed and we cannot have that happen. Please inform transport service providers not to expect pupils to wait outside the school fence for them.

While on the topic of transport, please ensure that all drivers behave with slow care and consideration on our campuses. When staff members ask that one slows down or does not stop or park in a specific place please do not cause a scene or be rude. The rules are all in place to ensure the best flow of traffic and the safety of the pupils. It is embarrassing and awkward when a parent or transport driver protests. We do not want to resort to punitive consequences for ignoring our internal road rules.

Please ensure that pupils are collected from school punctually. Loitering pupils find mischief and I am sure we all want our children safe and not thinking of unauthorised things to do. If pupils cannot be collected directly after their activities on campus, they need to be enrolled into the aftercare facilities so that they are appropriately cared for while on campus.

Polokwane campus stickers are in place to minimise traffic through our campus. We have found that other schools in the area use our school as a shortcut. The stickers also increase the safety of the pupils by only allowing authorised vehicles on campus. If a person without a sticker needs to come onto our campus unexpectedly, they are permitted to sign in with security. The sticker allows for regular cars to avoid signing in.

The badge and name sticker will be phased out and a less identifiable sticker will be used in the future. This may take a while to happen since we are going to use all of the old stock stickers first and then move to the new design.

What is the point of the Parent Forum?

We do not dismiss or ignore our parents' concerns. We are professionals running a professional school. The parents do not own the school and they do not run the school, however, we do value the opinions and inputs from our parents and caregivers. For this reason, we have created a formal structure that allows for interested and involved parents to meet once a quarter to chat to the Head and a teacher representative from the school about compliments and concerns. The guidelines for the Parent Forum are on the school webpage.

We are looking for about one parent per class. If you put yourself forward for this Parent Forum, please ensure that you are not extremely busy with your own work or travelling a lot. If you would like to serve on the Parent Forum for your child's school, please send an email to the school Head with the name and grade of your child as well as your name and cell number. You will need to be available for other parents to contact if they have a compliment or concern to raise.

I do want to remind all parents that your role in your child's education is to provide a physically and emotionally safe home for them to be themselves in and to be their cheerleader. We all need a cheerleader in life and parents and caregivers should give unconditional love and support to their children. I am not saying that there should be no boundaries or expectations in terms of behaviour, however, I am suggesting that every child should be loved for the essence of who they are by their primary adult caregivers.

So to summarise,

PEPPS develops independent, critical and creative thinkers through progressive, holistic education. Our intention is to truly honour our pupils by treating them with respect and dignity while holding them accountable to high standards.

As we go forward, we need to be fierce with reality. In other words, accept how our world is changing and be courageous enough to adapt to the changing educational needs.

For the 8th consecutive year, PEPPS achieved a PMR Award in 2021, recognising that we are admired in the business community of Limpopo. We are grateful that our work is appreciated. Thank you for entrusting your child to us. It is our privilege to serve your family.

God bless South Africa and her people and may God bless PEPPS and her people.

I thank you for your attention. Kealeboga, Dankie