

Reflections on early childhood development

Minister of Basic Education

The Honourable Siviwe Gwarube

It is my privilege to introduce the 2024 *South African Child Gauge*, an essential document that underscores the critical importance of integrated services for children from conception through school-going age to foster lifelong learning and success. This report arrives at a crucial moment in our nation's pursuit of universal access to high-quality and integrated early childhood development (ECD).

We recognise that early childhood development is a cornerstone of South Africa's future, shaping the foundational years crucial for children's cognitive and physical growth. Factors such as health, nutrition, nurture and stimulation significantly influence this developmental phase. When children receive adequate care during the formative early years, they embark on their educational journey with well-established foundations for personal well-being and future achievements.

Recognizing the pivotal role of early childhood development, we have prioritized it within our national agenda to enhance education quality and secure lasting prosperity for generations to come. Effective early childhood interventions are most impactful when policies and actions are intersectoral and cohesive, providing holistic support to young children and their families.



Since assuming responsibility for early childhood development in 2022, the Department of Basic Education has adopted an evidence-based approach to craft its 2030 Strategy for ECD Programmes. This strategy serves as a comprehensive blueprint aimed at achieving universal access to quality ECD programmes by 2030, with a strong emphasis on expanding access for the most vulnerable children.

Central to our strategy is the establishment of a new Social Compact for ECD, uniting stakeholders across sectors and communities.

Acknowledging that government efforts alone cannot achieve our ambitious goals, this compact seeks to harness community strengths and resources toward a shared vision of universal access to quality ECD programmes by 2030.

The 2024 *Child Gauge* embodies this vision by providing a robust, evidence-based assessment of the holistic provision of services to children. It serves as a beacon guiding our efforts to ensure every child in South Africa has the opportunity to thrive and succeed from the earliest stages of life.

I commend this report to all stakeholders committed to the well-being and future of our nation's children.