

The first day of schooling in our country is undoubtedly a national event drawing the entire country's focus on schools in every corner of our communities. Whilst the media and society looks with great deal of apprehension on the first day of schooling, Members of the KwaZulu-Natal Legislature roll out their sleeves and travel to inspect the readiness of learners and educators in most schools in the province. The programme named, School Functionality Monitoring aims to not only provide Members with insight into challenges and obstacles to quality teaching and learning, but it also provide an opportunity for Members to assist schools deal with such challenges. School visits also form part of the Member's oversight responsibility as required by the constitution to exercise oversight on number of areas of government including education.

The 11 January 2012 was the first day of schooling and the entire province was visited by all members of the KwaZulu-Natal Legislature including the Speaker, Ms NP Nkonyeni, the Deputy Speaker, Mr ME Mthimkhulu, and the Members of the Executive Council of the provincial government. Challenges identified during the School Functionality Programme are addressed immediately whilst others are directed to relevant stakeholders for their attention, with the expectation to speedily address such.

Some kids were lucky to receive school bags from both the Speaker and the Deputy as a sign of appreciation for their previous year's performance. These kids were identified by the schools, whilst some schools receive the Science Kit to boost teaching of Science.

School visits kick off with meetings with the Senior members of the Education Department in a particular District. These meetings provide an overview of a specific District, and discussions around logistics with regards to identified schools. It was in one of these meetings that the Deputy Speaker assured the staff that "we are not here to police you (referring to staff from education), but we want you to be as honest as possible about your problems, so that we are able to provide necessary assistance where you need it most".

After these visits, a report highlighting area of improvement is compiled and handed over to the MEC for Education for his intervention.