

19.4 REPORT 3: DEPUTIES CHRISTIAN EDUCATION – DEVELOPMENTS IN EDUCATION (Artt 139, 247)

- A. Dr DJ de Kock tables the Report.
- B. **Decision:** The Report are referred to Commission Youth and Education.
- C. Rev G Opperman reports on behalf of Commission Youth and Education.

D. REPORT

1. Mandate

- 1.1 The appointed Deputies take note of trends in the curriculum and education in general. Developments in education must be monitored and, where applicable, Christian reformed testimony must be given. Church Councils, parents and teachers should, where necessary, be advised about this (Acta 2012:227, 3.1).
- 1.2 Ongoing liaison by the CE Deputies with Aros must take place to keep abreast of development of education law and policies, in order for local Church Councils to stay informed (Acta 2012:227, 3.2).

2. Matters that the Synod take note of

- 2.1 It seems that most people, and that mainly means parents and teachers, are losing faith in the public education system. In a study in South Africa that was done in 2010-2011, it appears that parents are increasingly placing their children in independent or private schools, or home schooling as an alternative.
- 2.2 This trend follows the same pattern as occurred in the USA and Canada after "prayer" was prohibited in schools, namely that the parents' confidence in the public school system in the United States decreased as such that it is now only 29%. In Edmonton, Canada, a march to the education authority's offices with a petition signed by 3 600 parents was recently staged. The parents were dissatisfied with the Mathematics Curriculum that had been simplified, and the challenge from the parents was that there should not be experimented with their children. Surveys in Chicago have revealed a disturbing lack of reading skills: only one third of pupils could read properly.
- 2.3 In South Africa, home schooling is on the rise. At the same time, the transfer of students to private schools between 2000 and 2009 increased by 50%. Parents are simply not satisfied with what is going on, or not going on, in public schools.
- 2.4 Even teachers preferably move on to independent and private schools because subjected/surrendered to the indoctrination and constantly renewing programs of the Department. On the other hand, parents have lost interest, and have begun to view the school day as a mandatory time their children must spend at school, to be attended to by the teachers and then they themselves must start with homeschooling in the evening. In South Africa the government has not been favoured by the increase in private schools, and it is has been directly said that this type of "elitist independent schools" are seen as "bastions of class inequality".
- 2.5 By looking at single websites of Teachers Unions (like the SAOR, SADTU), it can be concluded from the monthly newsletters and reports in newspapers that education in South Africa is not currently in a healthy state. Reports of pupils fighting during school hours, assaulting and hurting each other, and teachers who do not seem to take notice of it, abound. In other schools the police are called and the pupils (in one case even girls) are arrested immediately. Violence is the order of the day at many schools, and no sign of order and discipline is detected. Principals have been kidnapped, students have been expelled because they have lodged a complaint against a teacher, and teachers have been assaulted because they have tried to maintain discipline.

- 2.6 Recently there has been quite a debacle in the news over the poor service of suppliers of textbooks and workbooks that were never delivered to schools. The Limpopo Province particularly suffered because of this. Although the case ended up in court, there has still been no verdict rendered, and as far as it has become clear from the news, the books have still not been delivered. The education of thousands of pupils has come to a standstill.
- 2.7 One of the most disturbing reports that has been published, is the case surrounding the sale of teaching positions which implicated unions, as well as school principals and members of the management councils of schools. An ordinary teaching position was apparently sold for as much as R30 000.
- 2.8 An occurrence which is quite worrying is the increasing migration of learners from rural areas to the cities. This happens especially in Gauteng and the Western Cape. This gives rise to unmanageable numbers in city schools and the problems associated with it are legion. The ideal would be decentralization, because in smaller schools better control can be exercised, the management of the school and classrooms can be done better, and teachers and parents can have a greater input on the education of their children.
- 2.9 In unmanageable large schools the safety of the teachers and the children are also in jeopardy. Reports of accidents in which many school children have lost their lives because of overloaded bakkies and combi's, is regularly in the news. Even the case of the lawnmower which ran over a child, speaks of negligence and carelessness that cannot be tolerated at any school.
- 2.10 The racial profile, and the accompanying language, culture and worldview matters, which lie in the foundation of the education of learners, is changing. This is especially a serious problem when the government intervenes and wants to change the language and culture of a school.
- 2.11 In a so-called "shock plan" for schools in Gauteng, the MEC for education in Gauteng, Mr Panyaza Lesufi, recently (*Beeld*, Tuesday, June 17, 2014:1) announced that he already has a technical team working to see how an environment of "social cohesion" can be created. His plan involves that some schools in Gauteng must "merge" with "township" schools, for better integration between schools, and therefore creating a non-racial environment. How much of true Christian education will come to its right in such schools, is not too hard to guess. The express purpose of this type of change is to correct "past mistakes", for the government owes it to the children of 1976, and to get rid of the stereotyping in our society.
- 2.12 According to Mr Paul Colditz, chief executive of the Federation of Governing Bodies of South African Schools (FEDSAS), this proposal will not work. He believes a better plan would be to rather have two schools function in partnership with each other. The fundamental philosophy of education is precisely that the community (parents!) themselves must accept responsibility for their children's education (school!). When parents of two communities that are far apart in distance and differ radically in culture, language and values, serve together in one governing body, the table is set for conflict. This type or model of education provision has been tried elsewhere in the world, but it failed. Research has also shown that balanced, conflict-free schools can only occur where the community works together in a balanced and conflict-free way for the type of school they want and deserve.
- 2.13 It is pleasing to report that despite the demand for integration of schools in terms of language, culture, beliefs and abilities (intellectual or cognitive), many state schools are still giving excellent education, and that pupils, despite all these barriers in education, can still learn and perform as before.

It is a fact that excellence in teaching and learning mainly takes place in the schools where the parent community is actively involved in the school, and where the relationship between the principal and his staff, and the principal and the parents, is healthy and uplifting.

3. Matters that the Synod decide on

Recommendations

- 3.1 The Deputies took note of the developments in education and trends in curriculum and education in general. It is recommended that the Synod again appoints CE Deputies to monitor the developments in education and where appropriate give the Christian Reformed testimony to Church Councils, parents and teachers.
- 3.2 A further recommendation is that ongoing liaising between the CO Deputies and Aros must occur in order to keep abreast of development in education law and policy, in order for local church councils to stay informed.

E. REPORT OF THE COMMISSION

1. Mandate

19.4, Report 3: Deputy Christian Education Developments in the Education.

Decision: Noted.

2. Matters that the Synod take note of

- 2.1 Background and Argument: There came questions from the meeting about the objectivity and balancing of the matters that the Synod had to take note of. The Commission is not able to substantiate or disprove the allegations within the timeframe of the meeting.
- 2.2 The Commission also points out the summarised paragraph 2.13 that clearly indicates that there are however state schools where children can still learn and achieve as before. This applies particularly at schools where parents are constructively involved.
- 2.3 The problem most likely existed with the formulation of the instruction that the Deputy should report about the trends in the education "in general".

Decision: Points 2.1 to 2.3 noted.

3. Matters that the Synod decide on

In light of above mentioned and CO, art 21 the Commission thus recommends that

- 3.1 The meeting only takes note of the matters mentioned in point 2.
- 3.2 The meeting amend the task/instruction (point 3.1 of the Report) as follows: "It is suggested that the Synod nominate CO Deputy to take note and to report about trends in the curriculum and the education with regard to the way the Christian doctrine and ethos are battered in that or not. Church Councils, parents and teachers should, were needed, also receive advice about this."

Decision: Points 3.1 and 3.2 approved.