

Education: The Impact on the Child and the Nation

[A Speech Delivered at the 9th Graduation Ceremony of Woodbridge International School held at the forecourt of the school, Kwesimintsim on Saturday, July 20, 2019]

By

Dr. Prince Hamid Armah

Executive Secretary (Ag.)

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA)

Mr Chairman,

Invited guests,

Parents,

Teachers,

Friends from the media,

Distinguished Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour to be here with you today as the special guest of honour for this auspicious event, when another batch of students, having undertaken the hard and necessary work of preparing and sitting for the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE), graduate from Woodbridge International School. I wish to congratulate all students who are graduating today. From this milestone, you are now prepared to go out and achieve, to chart a unique part for yourselves. I also wish to commend the teachers and administrative staff here at Woodbridge International School. If the children are the leaders of the future as we insist, then the task of nurturing them is nothing less than that of safeguarding the future of our country and on behalf of a grateful nation, I wish to thank you all for the work that you are doing. May God bless and reward you all.

Decades ago, I myself stood on the cusp of an uncertain future, as my younger brothers and sisters do today. Growing up right here in Kwesimintsim, I could not have predicted where fate would take me. Like many of you, I had big dreams and I was quite certain where I wanted to go, but there was no telling how far I could have gone. Throughout it all, however, over the course of the humble achievements that I have managed, there are a few lessons that I have learnt: hard work, focus and determination are key to life; and education can and does change lives and communities. It is these twin lessons that I wish to commend to our young ones today. Take your education very seriously, never take a day off from working towards your goals and never give up until you have achieved them.

The value of education as a tool for social transformation is not an argument that bears contest. Nevertheless, it bears repeating. Throughout history, societies that have focused on learning and discovery have flourished. A well educated workforce is the surest way to achieving our national goals of economic growth, reducing unemployment and fostering national cohesion. This means that our progress as a nation is hinged on having an educational system that is accessible, functional and fit for purpose.

When this government took over, it moved quickly to address the problem of access with the introduction of the Free Senior High School Policy. Under this policy, the barriers of cost that had previously impeded many qualified young people from attaining secondary education were removed. No wonder, in its first year alone, there was a three-fold increase in enrolment at that level, compared to the annual average from four years prior to its introduction. Not only that, government has moved to absorb many of the fees at all levels of education that had also acted as soft barriers to access to education. This is complemented by an ambitious programme of expansion of educational infrastructure to ensure that we have the capacity to absorb the increased numbers within the medium term. Until then, we have put in place the double track system, an innovative school calendar configuration that ensures that eligible students get an opportunity to transit to secondary education. By so doing, we are making optimum use of our existing infrastructure which previously lay dormant for up to six months every year.

Perhaps more important than all of these, ladies and gentlemen, is what and how our kids are studying in school. It is not enough for them to be in school and have adequate infrastructure, they must also experience relevant knowledge, skills, attitudes and values and be assessed the appropriately to justify the investment in money and expectation that a nation makes in the education of its young people. To that end, the Government of Ghana, through the Ministry of Education and the agencies under it, including the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, is embarking on evidence-based, far reaching root and branch reforms of our education system to ensure that it produces a generation of leaders, thinkers and innovators who will propel Ghana into the elite of club of developed nations.

Let me assure you that these reforms are not meant to assuage some partisan itch for tinkering just for the sake of it or to score some vague political points, but are informed above all by the welfare of the Ghanaian child and the need to provide them with a system of education that is comparable to best practices all over the world. They are a careful, intentional set of initiatives that have been widely consulted on and designed to stand the test of time. They are not mere cosmetic modifications but thorough and fundamental changes from the classroom right to the education office. And anyone who has taken the trouble to properly observe and understand will know that the purpose of these reforms is nationalistic in character and rooted in expert and technical knowledge and insight. These reforms are the result of extensive research which identified the weaknesses in our education system and proposed ways in which we can deal with them, from instruction to administration.

In the classroom, we will move towards a standards-based system of instruction and assessment from September, 2019. Under this, there will be clear scheduled outcomes against which the progress of pupils will be measured and problems, if identified, corrected through targeted intervention. The administrative reforms will see a broad decentralisation of education policy and oversight, with power being devolved to the district offices to ensure closer oversight, monitoring and evaluation. To be clear, these are not going to be rushed but undertaken over a period spanning a decade with time to assess impact and address any issues that might come up during implementation. It will be overseen by a delivery unit at the heart of the ministry and driven by agency heads whose performance agreements with the Minister of Education specifically enjoin them to deliver on these reforms.

It will also involve wide stakeholder engagement, training and collaboration, as evidenced in our engagement with private sector actors in education. The Ghana Education Service in collaboration with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment has trained more than 5000 teachers or master trainers who will in turn go on to train other teachers on the new curriculum from August. NaCCA in collaboration with the leadership of the private schools association will be training 100 master trainers from next week so they can also train their members from August, 2019. Under our plan, every teacher in the country, whether public or private, will have received training on the expectations of the new KG-P6 curriculum.

I am privileged to have been among the people tasked with this all important national duty and I can report to you that the reforms that we are embarking, with implementation of the new curriculum beginning in September this year, will potentially have a far reaching and positive impact on the future of this country. Not only will the content be streamlined to help students understand the learning areas better, but there will be changes in the methods of instruction, supervision and assessment. And just as importantly, there will be a focus on creating patriotic, law abiding citizens who will spend their adult lives working for a better country for generations yet to come.

Ladies and gentlemen, since independence our nation has strived to lift itself up and fulfill the promise of our founders. We have tried and failed to keep up with our peers. Today, under the leadership of His Excellency President Akufo-Addo, we aim anew for our rightful place with a return to the basics. A well-educated population, such as the President wants to create, is the fundamental building block that we have been missing all this while. And it begins with the reforms that we are embarking on. It also needs the cooperation of parents, teachers and administrators, opinion leaders, development partners and of course the students. We have a unique opportunity to change the destiny of this country. Let us grab this opportunity and make a difference. I have no doubt in my mind at all, that when we keep this focus on education, Ghana will be a very different country just one generation from now.

Among the leaders of that tomorrow can be some members of this graduating class here today. And to make that possible, I have a simple request to make of you. Never stop learning. Let today be more than a graduation; let it be the day you commit yourselves to eternal

scholarship. Let it be the first day of an unending quest to learn as much as you can; be the best you can be and never seek to be anything less than excellent. Your families, Kwesimintsim and the entire country expect no less of you. I am confident that you will not disappoint us.

Wherever you go, you'll have my best wishes, my prayers and my support.

I thank the management and staff of Woodbridge International School once again for the honour done me and I pledge my support to the school, as well as all other schools in Kwesimintsim, in the quest to create the next generation of leaders for the community.

Thank you.