



higher education  
& training

Department:  
Higher Education and Training  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

***SPEECH BY DEPUTY MINISTER DR NOMUSA DUBE-NCUBE AT THE LAUNCH OF THE ISCHOOLAFRICA CODING AND ROBOTICS CENTRE IGUGU PRIMARY SCHOOL, SOWETO, GAUTENG 12 MAY 2026***

Programme Director, Nkosinathi Nkosi and Babalwa jebe  
iStore CEO; Mr Chris Dodd  
iSchoolAfrica Director (Ms Michelle Lissoos );  
Ms Nozipho Motolo (Senior Programme Manager);  
School Principal and teachers  
iStore Maponya Mall staff,  
iSchoolAfrica Team,  
iSchoolAfrica school community  
And most importantly — the young people of Soweto and beyond,

**Sanibonani. Dumelang. Molweni. Good morning.**

I want to begin by standing still for a moment. Because this ground — this red, dusty, defiant soil of Soweto — is not ordinary ground. Fifty years ago, in 1976, young people not much older than the learners sitting in this very schoolyard today, rose up. They rose up not with weapons, but with placards, with their voices, and with an unbreakable conviction that they deserved to be educated — in their own language, in their own identity, on their own terms.

In 1976, the struggle was for the freedom to choose your language of instruction. In 2026, the struggle is for the freedom to choose your future. And let me tell you — coding IS a language. Robotics IS a language. Artificial Intelligence IS a language. These are the dialects of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. And just as our forebears refused to be excluded from learning in Sesotho, isiZulu, Setswana, isiXhosa — we refuse to allow our children to be excluded from the language of the future.

For too long, digital literacy, coding skills, and access to technology have been the exclusive privilege of children in Model C schools. Children whose parents could afford tablets, whose schools had fibre internet, whose classrooms had smartboards. Children from Sandton. From Constantia. From Umhlanga.

But what about the child in Khayelitsha? What about the child in KwaMashu? What about the child in Diepsloot? What about the child RIGHT HERE — in Soweto?

**THAT child is just as brilliant. THAT child is just as curious. THAT child deserves just as much. And today, with the launch of this iSchoolAfrica Coding and Robotics Centre, we are saying — loudly and without apology — that this child will no longer be left behind.**

I want to acknowledge and commend iStore Education and iSchool Africa for their commitment to this vision. What you are doing is not simply corporate social responsibility. What you are doing is nation building. iSchool Africa understands something fundamental: that technology, thoughtfully applied, does not replace teachers — it empowers them.

It does not replace learning — it deepens it. By partnering with institutions like this one, and by integrating Apple technology into learning environments in underserved communities, they are not just giving children access to devices. They are giving them access to possibility. This centre is not just a room with computers. This is a launchpad.

When we bring coding and robotics into Igugu Primary School in Mofolo South, we are doing the same thing those 1976 students did — we are breaking down a wall. We are saying that geography is not destiny. That a postal code should not determine a child's potential. That being born in a township is not a limitation — it is a launching pad.

Let me speak directly to the young people here today. Your parents and grandparents fought for the right to be educated in a language they understood. They fought so that you could go to school freely, safely, and with dignity. Because of their sacrifice, we built the National Student Financial Aid Scheme — NSFAS.

NSFAS exists so that a child from this very community — from Mofolo, from Orlando, from Diepkloof, from Meadowlands — can walk into a university or TVET college and say: I choose Mechanical Engineering. I choose Information Technology. I choose Renewable Energy. I choose Game Design. And know that the state will help carry that financial burden.

The freedom your grandparents fought for in 1976 was the freedom to LEARN. The freedom we are fighting for today is the freedom to CHOOSE what you learn, and to be financially supported in that choice.

Under this administration, we are strengthening NSFAS to ensure it is not just a scholarship — it is a passport to possibility. We are working to make it more efficient, more transparent, and more accessible, because we know that bureaucratic barriers are just as real as economic ones.

**If you are in this schoolyard today, dreaming about becoming a software developer, a robotics engineer, a data scientist, an esports professional — know that NSFAS was built for YOU.**

Let me speak plainly about the Fourth Industrial Revolution — because some people treat it like a distant, abstract concept. It is not distant. It is HERE. It is NOW. It is in this room.

The 4IR is transforming every single industry. It is changing how we manufacture, how we farm, how we heal the sick, how we move from place to place, and yes — how we learn. Countries that prepare their young people for this revolution will thrive. Countries that don't will be left behind.

**South Africa WILL NOT be left behind.**

**And Soweto WILL NOT be left behind.**

The Department of Higher Education and Training has a clear mandate: to align our skills pipeline with the needs of a 4IR economy. That means investing in Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics — the STEAM disciplines. It means modernising our TVET colleges so they produce graduates who are 4IR-ready. It means partnerships exactly like this one — where the private sector and government walk together.

Young people —I want to tell you about the world that is waiting for you. Not the world of the past, not the world that was designed to exclude people who look like us — but the NEW world. The world being built right now. And I want you to understand that YOU have a place in it.

### ***Esports***

How many of you play video games? Raise your hands. Good. Did you know that esports — competitive gaming — is now a multi-billion dollar global industry? Professional esports athletes earn salaries, attract sponsorships, and compete in arenas watched by millions. South Africa is developing a competitive esports ecosystem.

Your love for gaming can become a career in game design, software development, tournament management, or as a professional player. The Department is working with industry partners to create pathways into this space.

### ***Electric Vehicles***

The internal combustion engine is on its way out. The future of transport is electric. South Africa has the rare earth minerals that power electric vehicle batteries — lithium, cobalt, manganese. We are positioned to be a major player in EV manufacturing. We need engineers who understand this technology, technicians who can service these vehicles, and innovators who will design the next generation of African EVs. That engineer could be YOU.

### ***Artificial Intelligence and Data Science***

The world runs on data. The organisations and nations that understand how to collect, analyse and use data will dominate the 21st century. AI is already revolutionising healthcare, agriculture, finance, and education. We are training the next generation of AI engineers through our universities and TVET colleges. If you learn to code today — right here in this centre — you are taking your first step into this world.

### ***Renewable Energy and Green Economy***

South Africa is blessed with sun and wind. The just energy transition is not just a climate story — it is a jobs story. Solar panel installation, wind turbine maintenance, green building design, energy storage technology — these are the jobs of the next decade. We are creating skills programmes specifically to fill these roles.

### ***Drones and Aerospace***

From agricultural drones monitoring crops to delivery systems and aerial surveillance, the unmanned aerial vehicle industry is exploding. Robotics knowledge, which you will begin developing in this very centre, is directly applicable. Aerospace engineering and aviation maintenance are growing sectors. You could build, fly, or programme the drones that help feed South Africa.

**Young people: the world is not short of problems. It IS short of people who know how to solve them. BECOME those people.**

Let me be clear about what we are doing as a department. This is not rhetoric. These are plans.

- Curriculum Modernisation: We are working to embed digital literacy, coding and computational thinking into the post-school curriculum, ensuring that TVET and university graduates are 4IR-ready.
- Skills Centres of Excellence: We are establishing dedicated 4IR Skills Centres at TVET Colleges across previously disadvantaged communities, including in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Western Cape and Gauteng, with a specific focus on township and rural areas.
- Partnerships with Industry: Through the SETA framework and direct partnerships with technology companies, we are creating work-integrated learning opportunities that give students real-world experience in digital industries.
- NSFAS Strengthening: We are committed to making NSFAS responsive to emerging qualifications in technology, creative industries and the green economy, so students pursuing these fields are fully supported.
- Digital Infrastructure Investment: We are advocating for and investing in connectivity infrastructure at schools and colleges, because a coding centre without internet is like a library without books.
- Esports and Creative Economy Pathways: We are in active discussions to recognise esports-related qualifications and to create formal career pathways in the creative digital economy.
- Teacher and Lecturer Development: We cannot give students a 21st century education with 20th century educators. We are investing in continuous professional development for teachers and TVET lecturers in digital skills and 4IR-related disciplines.

I have visited schools in Khayelitsha. I have been to KwaMashu. I have walked through Langa, through Mamelodi, through Tembisa. I have looked into the eyes of learners who are as brilliant, as sharp, as hungry to learn as any child in any private school in this country.

The ONLY difference between them and their counterparts in well-resourced schools is ACCESS. Access to quality teachers. Access to technology. Access to information. Access to networks.

That is the injustice we are fighting. Not with guns. Not with stones. But with policy. With investment. With partnerships like the one we celebrate today.

iSchool Africa's work in previously disadvantaged communities is exactly the kind of intervention that changes the trajectory of individual lives — and of a nation. When a child in Soweto learns to code, they don't just learn a skill. They learn that the digital world belongs to them too. They learn that innovation is not reserved for Silicon Valley.

That the next great app, the next revolutionary technology, the next billion-dollar idea — can come from Mofolo South.

**It can come from THIS classroom.**

### ***A MESSAGE TO THE SOUL OF SOWETO***

Soweto, you have never been passive. You have never waited for liberation to be delivered to you. You went out and seized it. In 1976. In 1994. And today.

Orlando Stadium has seen champions. The streets of Soweto have produced Nobel laureates, captains of industry, world-class artists, revolutionary thinkers. Walter Sisulu was from here. Desmond Tutu called this place home. Miriam Makeba's music carried the pain and beauty of this community to the whole world.

That spirit — that stubborn, defiant, creative, ingenious spirit — is still HERE. It is in this schoolyard. It is in these children's eyes. We owe it to the class of 1976 to make sure that every child in Soweto, in 2026, has access to the tools they need to shape the future. This coding and robotics centre is our down payment on that promise.

The Soweto Uprising of 1976 was a revolution of the mind. Young people refused to accept intellectual subjugation. They said: we will define our own education.

Today's revolution is the same, just with a different battlefield. The battlefield is the digital divide. The weapons are computers, coding languages, robotics kits and broadband internet. And the soldiers are the learners sitting right here.

The Department of Higher Education and Training stands with you. iSchool Africa and iStore Education stand with you. The government of South Africa stands with you.

To every child here today: you are not just students. You are pioneers. You are the proof that Soweto's genius is alive and evolving. You are the living legacy of 1976.

**Code with purpose. Build with vision. Dream without limits.**  
**Siyabonga. Ke a leboha. Enkosi. Thank you.**