

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

FOR WRITTEN REPLY QUESTION 100

DATE OF PUBLICATION IN INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER: 09-02-2007
(INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO. 01-2007)

Mrs C Dudley to ask the Minister of Education

- (1) What challenges are schools facing regarding delivery of (a) books and (b) stationery;
- (2) whether there are (a) any general or (b) specific difficulties in this regard; if so, which provinces are experiencing specific difficulties;
- (3) whether any steps have been taken to rectify the situation; if not, why not; if so, what steps?

N105E

REPLY:

(1) (a) and (b) Provincial education departments are responsible for the procurement and distribution of books and stationery. From reports received it is evident that provincial departments experience greater problems with the delivery of textbooks than stationery. Stationery is more readily available from various providers, while textbooks can only be obtained from publishers. They are the sole provider for a specific book and only print and provide books when orders from all the departments have been received. The provisioning of small orders and out of print titles also affect the actual delivery at schools.

(2) (a) and (b) The textbook supply chain of the Western Cape, Northern Cape and the North West PEDs work best. The Western Cape uses an "open book system" that allows schools to procure alternative titles if the original chosen titles are out of print. Although the textbook supply chains of the other provinces are theoretically sound, they have never been able to deliver the textbooks in time due to:

- delays in the selection process, compilation of a catalogue and the collating of requisitions from schools, resulting in the late awarding of tenders and the consequent late placement of orders to enable delivery to warehouses and the distribution to schools in time;
- the cumbersome administrative processes to procure and obtain suppliers for delivery and distribution of textbooks. Several interdependent tenders have to be managed to enable delivery at schools;

- the application of the policy to support SMMEs; and
- the fact that publishers only print after the PEDs have committed orders results in the late delivery of books.

The supply chain for textbooks starts at least 8 months before the opening of schools for a specific school year. Migration of learners and poor retrieval rates for textbooks makes it almost impossible for schools to project their actual needs for a specific Grade and/or learning area. Most of the schools in rural areas do not have storerooms or appropriate facilities to receive and store material before the opening of schools. Textbooks can, therefore, only be distributed to those schools after the schools have opened.

(3) The provinces are dealing with their specific challenges. The current costing structure for textbooks and the poor retrieval rate make it difficult to provide textbooks to all learners in all grades and learning areas/subjects. I am investigating the total system for the supply of textbooks and hope to take action to improve the system in order to have books provided to all learners on time.