

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

FOR ORAL REPLY QUESTION 191

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DATE TO REPLY IN PARLIAMENT: 20-09-2006

Mr V C Gore to ask the Minister of Education:

- (1) What are the key findings of the Human Rights Commission hearings on the right to basic education in terms of disability;
- (2) Whether her department has taken note of the findings; if not, why not; if so, what measures have been put in place to address the concerns raised in the hearings?

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REPLY:

- 1) The key findings are that;
 - (a) education facilities are either unavailable or unaccessible to some learners with disabilities and
 - (b) inclusive education is not working for children with disabilities.
- 2) Yes, the Department of Education has taken note of the findings.

First, we are establishing a number of full-service schools in areas of the country where no specialized provision is currently available. This is a new model of ordinary inclusive school, which is equipped to support a full range of learner needs. By the end of 2007 the Department should be in a position to indicate how ordinary schools can be effectively converted into fully inclusive schools.

Second, the Department is monitoring the processes of admissions to existing special schools, so as to ensure that no learners in need of such support and facilities are excluded or refused admission. This should ensure that the existing specialised facilities are being optimally and equitably utilised. In July this year 4,500 teachers, school and district support staff were trained on the Draft National Strategy for Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support. A further 2,500 teachers will be trained on inclusive learning programmes in September. Each of the two sets of training sessions is followed up by site support visits to ensure that knowledge is effectively applied in local contexts. The disability sector, specifically the deaf and blind lobby, have been involved in this training throughout the process.

Third, the Department is running a national programme on the strengthening of special schools, not only in terms of physical facilities but also in terms of curriculum delivery. Concerns of the blind and deaf communities about quality of delivery are being addressed through a training programme for teachers in South African Sign Language, Braille and inclusive curriculum programme development. This programme is run in consultation with organisations, which represent the interests of deaf and blind learners and District Support Teams have been established in all provinces.

Last, the Department has taken measures to ensure that all new schools that are being built comply with the specifications for universal access.

