

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 2928.

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2928. Mr S S Zibi (Rise Msanzi) to ask the Minister of Basic Education:

(1) Given the substantial increase in violent crimes reported at educational institutions in the 2024-25 financial year, what (a) steps has her department taken to increase overall safety at schools and early childhood development centres and (b) are the relevant details of the (i) specific interventions, (ii) locations targeted and (iii) budget allocated in this regard;

(2) what (a) steps has her department taken to ensure that girls and women are safe at schools and early childhood development centres and (b) are the relevant details of the (i) specific interventions, (ii) locations targeted and (iii) budget allocated in this regard

(3) given that year-on-year reports of rape cases have increased in the Eastern Cape, Free State, Mpumalanga and the North West, what is her department's approach to address the specified issue;

(4) what steps has her department taken to ensure that (a) persons found guilty of violent crimes are not appointed as staff members at schools and early childhood development centres and (b) staff members found guilty of such crimes are removed from such facilities?

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 2928.

Response

(1)(a) The Department of Basic Education (DBE), in partnership with the South African Police Service (SAPS), has developed a new Safe Schools Implementation Protocol and accompanying Work Plan to strengthen overall safety in schools.

The most strategic intervention to improve the safety of children in Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes currently is to ensure that all ECD programmes are registered with the DBE, so that the DBE can have oversight of ECD programmes.

(b)(i) The areas of focus for the Safe Schools Implementation Protocol are summarised under the following key themes:

- Implementation of School Safety Programmes in selected schools within hotspot areas;
- Establishment of School Safety Committees nationwide through the National School Safety Framework (NSSF);
- Implementation of the Prevention and Management of Bullying Programme in schools;
- Mediation and implementation of the Protocol for the Management and Reporting of Sexual Abuse and Harassment in Schools;
- Linking of schools to local police stations;
- Quarterly consultative meetings to monitor progress by the two departments; and
- Interdepartmental campaigns on drug and substance abuse.

(ii) The first phase of implementation will target the provinces of Gauteng, Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape. Working teams will also be established in all nine provinces, with replication across districts.

(iii) The DBE and SAPS have identified budgets from within their allocated voted funds to support the implementation of the new Safe Schools Implementation Protocol and Work Plan.

(2)(a) Through the Life Skills and Life Orientation curriculum, issues of learner safety, gender equity, and human rights are addressed. Supplementary initiatives such as the HIV and AIDS Life Skills Education Programme, and the Adolescents and Young People (AYP) Programme, reinforce protective strategies for girls and women. All schools are required to be linked to their nearest police stations with the contact details

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 2928.

of a designated police officer provided as part of the Adopt-a-Cop initiative. Some school communities have further strengthened institutional arrangements by involving Community Police Forums. Additionally, the Gender-Responsive Pedagogy for Early Childhood Education (GRP4ECE) has been rolled out to ECD practitioners and Grade R educators in eight provinces to promote gender-sensitive practices that create safer environments for young children.

(b)(i)(ii) The Life Skills and Life Orientation curriculum is delivered in all public schools. The HIV and AIDS Life Skills Education Programme operates in high-burden schools in all nine provinces. Almost all schools are linked to police stations, and the GRP4ECE programme has reached over 5,000 ECD practitioners across eight provinces (excluding the Western Cape).

(iii) A total of R500,000 has been allocated from voted funds to support national oversight and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV) prevention efforts across provinces.

(3) A transversal task team within the DBE, working in collaboration with stakeholders such as the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC) and the South African Council for Educators (SACE), has been established to focus on eradicating corporal punishment and sexual abuse in schools. Plans are underway to convene an Expanded Interprovincial Engagement involving sector stakeholders and SAPS, aimed at reaffirming national commitments to ending school-related gender-based violence, addressing the increase in rape cases, and strengthening procedures for the management and reporting of sexual abuse and harassment in schools.

(4)(a)(b) The DBE has launched the **Bana Pele Mass Registration Drive** to ensure that all ECD programmes are registered with the DBE. As part of this process, all adults working at an ECD programme must be screened against the National Child Protection Register. ECD programmes are also required to comply with the minimum norms and standards for partial care facilities, as outlined in the Children's Act. The DBE will be seeking further legal clarity on the application of the National Child Protection Register and the National Register of Sex Offenders within the ECD environment. Furthermore, compliance requires visits from emergency services and environmental health practitioners from local municipalities. Only those ECD programmes that meet these requirements are eligible to register with the DBE and qualify for state funding. The initiative is implemented nationally through a public-private partnership with the social development sector and is essential to ensuring that individuals found guilty of violent crimes or abuse cannot operate within ECD environments.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 2928.

With regard to schools, the DBE has issued a directive to all Provincial Education Departments (PEDs) that employers of persons who are or will be employed at schools are legally required to:

- conduct suitability checks before finalising any appointment;
- immediately terminate employment if an individual is found to be listed on the NRSO or the NCPR; and
- comply with all legal provisions, with failure constituting a criminal offence punishable by imprisonment, a fine, or both.

The **NRSO**, maintained by the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development (DoJ&CD), and the **NCPR**, maintained by the Department of Social Development (DSD), serve to prevent unsuitable persons from working with or caring for children. While these registers are not consolidated, PEDs have been granted access to Part B of the NCPR and trained human resource practitioners are able to conduct checks. NRSO checks, however, must be submitted directly to the NRSO Registrar, which has caused delays due to capacity constraints at SAPS and DoJ&CD level. PEDs have agreed to cover the costs associated with vetting employees against the NRSO.

The Head of each PED is responsible for ensuring that vetting against both registers is completed for all staff in state-funded posts. Governing Bodies of public schools, and owners of independent schools, are similarly responsible for vetting employees in posts funded through their own resources.

In support of these legal responsibilities, the DBE has:

- facilitated training for PED officials with DSD on NCPR access;
- initiated monthly compliance monitoring with DoJ&CD on NRSO checks;
- issued questionnaires during school readiness visits to assess compliance;
- engaged with SAPS and DoJ&CD on payment protocols and delays, including a technical task team to address these implementation bottlenecks; and
- created a Funza Lushaka bursary provision for final-year students to obtain NRSO vetting.

The DBE will, in June 2025, sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Minister of Police to enhance school safety and vetting cooperation.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 2928.

The Minister and the Department of Basic Education remain committed to ensuring that all schools and ECD centres are safe, inclusive and nurturing environments for every learner and educator. Through strengthened interdepartmental partnerships, targeted prevention programmes, robust protocols and proactive monitoring, the DBE is intensifying efforts to address violence, protect vulnerable learners, particularly girls and young children, and uphold the constitutional rights of all within the basic education sector. Learner safety is not negotiable and remains central to the delivery of quality education in South Africa.

A school is an extension of its community, and ensuring learner and teacher safety cannot rest with schools alone. It requires every role-player; families, community leaders, civil society, law enforcement, educators, religious leaders, and every member of society to play their part. A whole-of-society response is needed to build a culture of safety, dignity, and accountability in all our learning environments.