

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 158.

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158. Dr D C Christians (DA) to ask the Minister of Basic Education: to ask the Minister of Basic Education:

(1) What targeted interventions is her department implementing to improve foundational literacy and numeracy outcomes for learners in Quintile 1–3 schools, where deficits are most severe;

(2) how does her department plan to integrate the measures with dropout prevention strategies to keep learners engaged throughout their schooling, particularly in economically disadvantaged communities?

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Response

Following a review of the results emanating from the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), the Southern and East Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SEACMEQ) assessment and the South African Systematic Evaluation (SASE), the Department of Basic Education (DBE) is undertaking a strategic reorientation of the schooling system towards improving early learning (including improving literacy and numeracy in the Foundation Phase) for all learners, including learners in public schools in Quintiles 1 to 3. This is intended to address significant gaps in literacy and numeracy, as identified by the abovementioned diagnostic assessments.

The Minister of Basic Education has outlined the following systemic interventions that will be implemented, especially in Quintiles 1 to 3 schools, to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes as part of the strategic reorientation towards improving early learning:

- Improving access to quality Early Childhood Development;
- Promoting Mother Tongue-based Bilingual Education; and
- Improving learning outcomes in the Foundation Phase by:
 - Improving teacher development for the Foundation Phase, which includes enhancing educators' capacities in the languages they teach, aligning with the DBE's strategic focus on African language literacies;
 - Improving post provisioning for the Foundation Phase;
 - Strengthening curriculum delivery in the Foundation Phase; and
 - Ensuring schools have their five Ts in place:
 - Time on task (i.e. protecting teaching and learning time);
 - Teacher preparedness and knowledge;
 - Textbooks and other texts, which are culturally and linguistically relevant and pedagogically sound;
 - Technology; and
 - Testing.

Further details of each of these systemic interventions were set out in the Minister's address at the 2024 National Senior Certificate results release event held on

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13 January 2025, as well as the Minister's address at the release of the TIMMS, SEACMEQ and SASE results on 4 December 2024. A copy of the Minister's addresses in this regard can be accessed online via the DBE's website at: <https://www.education.gov.za/Newsroom/Speeches.aspx>.

In addition to the above, the DBE recognises that greater collaboration across government, NGOs, communities and educational institutions is essential to strengthening any social compact focused on the effective implementation of language and literacy strategies. To this end, the DBE is committed to mobilising a diverse group of stakeholders, including parents, communities and libraries, to support learners' reading development rooted in African languages and social meaning-making practices. The strategic intention of this commitment is to integrate school and community literacy efforts through a unified framework, leveraging African languages to position literacy as a social practice and ensuring seamless learning experiences for students. Recognising the important role that various stakeholders and resources play in this regard is essential for achieving literacy goals and ensuring the effective implementation of reading initiatives in Quintile 1-3 schools. Key partners, such as Room to Read, Nal'ibali, A Better Africa, FUNDZA and SAPESI (known as the Literacy Promotion Collective), play a pivotal role in enhancing collaborations with Provincial Education Departments and implementing flagship programmes nationwide. Initiating provincial models for reading literacy programmes and fostering collaboration with NGOs and provinces aligns with the DBE's strategic objectives.

The above systemic interventions are being supported by various strategies, policies and programmes aimed at improving learner retention rates and mitigating the socio-economic issues associated with low learner retention rates. Key initiatives in this regard include:

- **National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP):** This programme promotes school attendance by addressing hunger and malnutrition, both of which have a detrimental impact on learning and cognitive development. The NSNP helps learners remain in school by ensuring they have access to at least one nutritious meal per day.
- **No-Fee Schools Policy:** This intervention makes education accessible by eliminating school fees in lower-income areas, thereby reducing financial barriers to school access and attendance. It ensures that learners in poorer communities can attend school without placing additional financial strain on households.
- **Policies on Early or Unintended Pregnancy:** In 2021, Government Notice 704 formalised policies to protect the educational rights of pregnant

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learners - an essential step considering that approximately 10% of females aged 16 to 18 have reported not attending school due to pregnancy, as indicated by the 2019 General Household Survey (GHS). The policy aims to provide supportive frameworks so that early or unintended pregnancy does not result in learners exiting the education system permanently.

- **Early Grade Learning Improvement Initiatives:** Literacy programmes, such as the Early Grade Reading Programme, that have been field-tested and proven to be effective are being implemented in schools in districts that have very limited economic opportunities, such as John Taolo Gaetsewe in the Northern Cape and Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompati in the North West.
- **Expanded Access to Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSM):** The DBE has a workbook programme that targets Languages, Mathematics and Life Skills. Some of the workbooks have interactive activities aimed at increasing engagement with literacy activities. In addition to workbooks, various quality open-source LTSM, such as levelled readers, were developed in the official Home Languages and are freely available to schools and learners. Such LTSM is available as resources for digital libraries and can be printed as resources for school libraries and mobile classroom libraries.
- **Expanded Learner Tracking and Monitoring Systems:** Tools like the Learner Unit Record Information and Tracking System (LURITS), SA-SAMS school management system and the Data Driven Districts (DDD) initiative are crucial in monitoring school attendance and identifying areas relevant to learner retention. These systems proved vital during the COVID-19 pandemic by helping the DBE track learner attendance and implement targeted interventions in areas where learner retention rates lagged. The DBE uses these tools to track learner performance on a quarterly basis and data on learner performance, which is analysed and reported on at various platforms and engagements with Provincial Education Departments.

The DBE remains committed to further strengthening these measures to ensure that all learners, regardless of background, can access quality education and complete their schooling. The focus on early grade improvements, supportive policies and programmes and targeted tracking is designed to improve learner retention rates and address the systemic inequalities impacting many learners across South Africa.