

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 521.

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521. Mrs W R Alexander (DA) to ask the Minister of Basic Education: to ask the Minister of Basic Education:

Whether her department is responsible for paying public schools electricity accounts; if not, what is the position in this regard; if so, what (a) is the total amount outstanding to the Lesedi Local Municipality for electricity accounts of specified schools in the area (details furnished), (b) are the reasons for the failure of her department to meet its financial obligations to the specified municipality, resulting in the disconnection of electricity to the specified schools and (c) immediate measures will her department implement to settle the outstanding amounts owed to the municipality and thereby prevent such disconnections from recurring in the future; given that the extended disruption to teaching and learning caused by electricity disconnections is of serious concern, and that the interruptions were entirely preventable through proper financial management by her department?

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Response

The National Department of Basic Education (DBE) is not responsible for paying electricity accounts for public schools. The responsibility for the payment of municipal services, including electricity services, to public schools generally lies with Provincial Education Departments (PEDs), which allocate funding for these services from their respective equitable share allocations in terms of the Norms and Standards for School Funding.

Where the function of paying for electricity services is taken on by the School Governing Body of a public school by arrangement with the relevant PED, that School Governing Body will be responsible for ensuring the timeous payment of these services. Where a public school struggles to meet its financial obligations, the relevant Provincial Education Department is expected to intervene and provide the necessary support to prevent disruptions to teaching and learning.

The DBE's financial responsibility to PEDs is limited to Conditional Grants, which are transferred to PEDs in terms of the Division of Revenue Act (DoRA) to fund specific programmes. Conditional Grants are separate from school allocations made from equitable share funding received by PEDs.

The DBE has been informed by the Gauteng Provincial Department of Education (which is responsible for the electricity accounts of 14 public schools in the Lesedi Local Municipality) of the following:

- A total outstanding debt for electricity accounts of R1 180 179 was recorded as at 31 January 2025;
- On 20 February 2025, the Gauteng Provincial Department of Education paid R835 961.85 towards this debt, leaving a remaining balance of R344 217.15, which is expected to be settled during March 2025;
- The Gauteng Provincial Department of Education has experienced cash flow challenges, which resulted in delays in settling the outstanding electricity accounts; and
- The Gauteng Provincial Department of Education will strengthen its cash flow management processes to ensure timely payment of municipal accounts and prevent future disconnections that disrupt teaching and learning.

This question falls under the executive authority of the Member of the Executive Council (MEC) for Education in Gauteng. In accordance with Section 92(3)(b) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 and Rule 134(5)(b) of the National

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Assembly Rules, the Honourable Member is advised to refer the question to the MEC should further details regarding the specific public schools in question be required.