

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION 579.**

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**579.. Ms N A Mtshweni (MK) to ask the Minister of Basic Education: to ask the Minister of Basic Education:**

Considering that a 46-year-old teacher, Ms Dudu Khumalo, was fatally shot on 29 July 2024 at the Phikiswayo Primary School in Ntuzuma, KwaZulu-Natal, indicating that the escalation of violent crimes, including gun violence, has become alarmingly prevalent, what (a) steps have and/or will be taken to address the issue of safety in schools and (b) measures are being implemented to provide support and justice for the victims of such violence?

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#### Response

#### VIOLENT CRIMES AND GUN VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

*Considering that a 46-year-old teacher, Ms Dudu Khumalo, was fatally shot on 29 July 2024 at the Phikiswayo Primary School in Ntuzuma, KwaZulu-Natal, indicating that the escalation of violent crimes, including gun violence, has become alarmingly prevalent, what (a) steps have and/or will be taken to address the issue of safety in schools and (b) measures are being implemented to provide support and justice for the victims of such violence?*

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) and KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Provincial Education Department were highly distressed to hear about the senseless loss of Ms Dudu Khumalo's life in the shooting at Phikiswayo Primary School on the 29th July 2024. As a department, there are a number of protocols and policies being actively implemented in schools to prevent this kind of violence and ensure that schools remain safe spaces that are weapon-free – it is concerning that despite these measures an incident of this nature has taken place. It is reported by Phikiswayo Primary school that one of their Grade R educators was fatally shot on the school premises by two unknown persons, who entered the school pretending to be parents of a grade R learner on the morning of the 29th July 2024. Upon hearing of this incident, the District Director, Circuit Managers and Special Needs Education Services (SNES) in KwaZulu-Natal were all dispatched to the school in question to provide support to those affected, and to the school. Additionally, School Safety and Security in the Pinetown District visited the school to ensure that all safety protocols as outlined in the NSSF were in place. They identified that the school was linked with the Ntuzuma Police Station (SAPS) via the SAPS protocol who are reported to have responded to the scene within minutes of the incident. In terms of carrying out an investigation into this incident and providing justice for the victim, the onus remains on law enforcement agencies such as SAPS to act swiftly, and to this end, a case has already been opened with the Ntuzuma Police Department (Case no. CAS 343/7/2024).

In order to provide the school with the necessary support to get through this traumatic event, the department has deployed a Safety Officer to the school to assist with reinforcing current safety and security protocols, and a debriefing for both educators and learners was carried out with SNES. Additionally, the Department of Social Development and the Employee Assistant Programme deployed separate teams to the school to provide psychosocial support to learners and educators for 2 weeks following the incident. The victim's family was also provided with support through transportation to their loved one's memorial service, psychosocial support and trauma debriefing by a social worker provided by the department, facilitation of fast-tracking

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of the victim's post-mortem, and assistance with funeral arrangements facilitated by the department in collaboration with the school and the victim's family.

The DBE continues to implement the National School Safety Framework (NSSF), which is a guiding framework in addressing all forms of violent incidences in schools including gun violence. The NSSF empowers schools to identify and manage all safety threats in schools, establish school safety committees comprising of stakeholders such as teachers, police officers, school governing body members and learner representative council members. Furthermore, The NSSF also empowers schools to develop incident reporting mechanisms, establish collaborations with external stakeholders such as the South African Police Service (SAPS), the Department of Social Development and civil society organisations, develop school safety plans and policies to respond to safety challenges of violence in schools for both learners and educators. Through the implementation of the NSSF, access control measures in schools are strengthened and awareness programmes by partner departments and civil society organisations are implemented in schools. In this case, the Safety Officer deployed to the school has recommended that the school strengthen their access control policy and implement a "by appointment only" policy at the school so that the security guard may always be certain of the identity of visitors to the school. Currently, the school allows parents to come and go as they please, and this led to the criminals involved in this shooting to impersonate parents to gain access to the school premises.

The Department also has an established Protocol with SAPS to address crime and violence in schools. The Protocol enables all schools to be linked to their local police stations, SAPS to conduct searches and seizures in schools and conduct crime awareness campaigns in schools. Searches and seizures aim to reduce violence in the schools (including gun violence) by confiscating contraband such as weapons, drugs, alcohol and other dangerous items to ensure that schools remain weapon and drug free zones. However, these searches and seizures are only conducted if there is reasonable suspicion of violence in the school. Regularly, schools further work with SAPS, local community police forums and social workers to address violent incidents such as gangsterism, bullying, drug abuse and the carrying of dangerous weapons in schools. It is evident that this protocol was well established at the school in question, and their linked SAPS station (Ntuzuma Police Station) responded to the incident rapidly, and opened a case as soon as possible, providing whatever support they could to the school.

As the DBE, this incident will be followed up to ensure that Phikiswayo Primary School are able to move forward from this incident with appropriate support, and reinforcement of their safety protocols to ensure an incident like this does not occur in the school ever again, and educators and learners can feel safe within their school.

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The protocols and policies of the DBE will continue to be refined and implemented in schools across the country to prevent incidents of this nature from occurring in other schools, and to keep our children and educators safe, and keep our schools gun- and violence-free zones