

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF PROVINCES

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 1248.

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1248. Ms M Kennedy (Limpopo: EFF) to ask the Minister of Basic Education:

Barrier-free physical environments

What measures are in place to ensure that all special needs schools have barrier-free physical environments, including buildings and grounds to promote independence and equality?

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Response

Regulation 6 of the *Regulations Relating to Minimum Uniform Norms and Standards for Public School Infrastructure (2024)* provides that:

1. *All schools must adhere to the requirements and principles of Universal Design. This applies to all buildings, access ways, indoor and outdoor facilities, as well as signage, communication and other services in new schools and to additions, alterations and improvements to existing schools.*
2. *In addition, schools for learners with special education needs must comply with the requirements related to the nature of the specialised support programme offered at the school, and the level of support required at that particular school.*

In line with these provisions, the Department of Basic Education (DBE), in collaboration with Provincial Education Departments (PEDs), is implementing several measures to ensure that all special schools progressively meet universal accessibility standards.

While the DBE is responsible for setting national policy, norms and standards, as well as providing oversight and technical support, **the provisioning, management, and maintenance of school infrastructure is the responsibility of PEDs**, who serve as the **implementing agents** for infrastructure delivery in their respective provinces.

To ensure that all special schools have barrier-free environments that promote independence and equality, the following measures are being implemented:

- **Universal design compliance:** All new school infrastructure projects, including special schools, are required to comply with universal design standards. This includes the installation of ramps, widened doorways, accessible ablution facilities, appropriate classroom layouts, and tactile signage for visually impaired learners.
- **Infrastructure upgrades through PEDs:** Existing schools are being assessed and upgraded to improve accessibility through the *Education Infrastructure Grant (EIG)*. PEDs have incorporated accessibility audits and barrier-removal projects into their Infrastructure Asset Management Plans (IAMPs), ensuring that retrofitting and modifications are prioritised in the provincial infrastructure pipeline.
- **Specialised facility design:** Infrastructure design for special schools is tailored to the specific needs of learners with disabilities. This includes therapy

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rooms, mobility support spaces, sensory rooms, hostels, and other specialised facilities that align with the level of support required at each school.

- **Oversight and monitoring:** The DBE monitors the implementation of the Norms and Standards through the *Education Facilities Management System (EFMS)* and conducts regular provincial reviews to ensure that planned projects incorporate universal design requirements.
- **Capacity building and collaboration:** The DBE continues to collaborate with the Departments of Social Development and Health, as well as with disability advocacy organisations, to enhance inclusive infrastructure delivery. Provincial officials, implementing agents and project managers receive ongoing training on universal design principles and accessibility standards.

The DBE remains committed to working with PEDs to progressively ensure that all special schools are barrier-free, inclusive and accessible. This forms part of the sector's broader commitment to realising the constitutional rights of all learners, particularly those with disabilities, to basic education in a safe, enabling and dignified learning environment.