

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF PROVINCES

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 1306.

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1306. Ms M Kennedy (Limpopo: EFF) to ask the Minister of Basic Education:

Learner-to-school/educator ratios

What measures are in place to reduce (a) learner-to-school and (b) learner-to-educator ratios in public schools?

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Response

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) is actively working to ensure equitable access to quality education across the country. One of the key strategies to address challenges such as overcrowding and unequal resource distribution is the continuous improvement of the learner-to-educator and learner-to-school ratios in public schools.

Post Provisioning Framework:

Provincial Education Departments (PEDs) apply the **Post Provisioning Norms (PPN)** to determine the distribution of educator posts. These nationally developed frameworks are designed to ensure the equitable and efficient allocation of teachers to schools based on learner enrolment, school type and curriculum requirements.

The PPN play a crucial role in managing educator distribution by taking into account each school's size, learner enrolment trends and subject offerings. This approach helps ensure the viability of smaller and rural schools, while promoting efficiency in the utilisation of human resources across the education system.

Current Ratios and Class Size Goals:

While there are no fixed, legislated norms and standards prescribing maximum learner-to-educator ratios, the PPN applies the principle of "ideal maximum class sizes", which the sector continuously strives to achieve:

- **General Education and Training (GET) Phase:** Ideally between 35 and 40 learners per class; and
- **Further Education and Training (FET) Phase:** Class sizes vary by subject, ranging from as few as 6 learners for subjects such as Music to approximately 37 learners for larger group subjects.

However, actual class sizes and ratios are influenced by a range of practical factors, including:

- The availability of classroom space and physical infrastructure;
- The distribution of learners within and across grades;
- Learner migration and urbanisation patterns;
- Timetabling constraints and subject combinations; and
- The overall size and location of the school.

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Further to the above, the DBE monitors class sizes in public schools through data collected from PEDs and provides planning and post provisioning support to PEDs.

Future Improvements and Ongoing Reforms:

Under the leadership of the Minister of Basic Education, the DBE is currently ensuring that the PPN are reviewed as a matter of urgency. Unlike most other education policies, the PPN have not been updated in over 20 years and need to be aligned with our current priorities, including the urgent need to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes in the Foundation Phase.

In particular, this review is aimed at:

- Aligning educator allocations with the DBE's strategic focus on improving literacy and numeracy in the Foundation Phase;
- Addressing historical inefficiencies that favour secondary schools with large subject offerings at the expense of early-grade class sizes; and
- Supporting smaller class sizes in the Foundation Phase to ensure that learners acquire the necessary reading, writing and calculating skills early in their schooling career.

Through this process, we hope to ensure that the PPN will better support our efforts to improve learning outcomes across all phases of schooling, provide for a more efficient distribution of educator posts and assist PEDs in mitigating the impact of budget reductions.

In addition, the DBE continues to work closely with PEDs to:

- Address infrastructure constraints that contribute to overcrowding;
- Monitor school enrolment and migration trends; and
- Ensure that budget allocations for educator posts under the Equitable Share and Education Infrastructure Grant (EIG) are utilised effectively to support equitable access to quality education.

Overcrowding remains a significant challenge, particularly in high-growth urban and township areas where demand for school placements exceeds available infrastructure. Addressing these challenges requires targeted interventions, including the provision of additional classrooms, deployment of mobile units and infrastructure expansion.

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The equitable allocation of infrastructure resources to provinces is primarily guided by the allocation of the EIG. The EIG is a conditional grant aimed at addressing infrastructure backlogs in the basic education sector, including the construction of new and replacement schools, additional classrooms, sanitation facilities, and maintenance of existing infrastructure. The EIG allocation formula considers, among other factors, the learner population per province, thereby ensuring that provinces with higher enrolment – and therefore more pressing infrastructure demands – receive proportionally higher allocations.

In response to increased classroom overcrowding and persistent funding constraints, the Minister of Basic Education has taken proactive steps. Through the Council of Education Ministers (CEM), a resolution has been adopted to approach the National Treasury to engage on the implications of budget cuts and to secure additional funding to sustain quality education delivery. These efforts aim to ensure that funding for basic education, including educator posts and infrastructure expansion, is shielded from austerity-induced cuts.

In the interim, the Minister of Basic Education and the DBE will continue supporting MECs for Education and PEDs in implementing strategies to mitigate overcrowding. These include:

- The optimal placement of educators declared in addition;
- Improved management of educator leave, particularly long-term incapacity leave;
- Timely filling of vacant posts;
- Utilisation of mobile classrooms and temporary infrastructure, where applicable; and
- Efficient use of existing classroom space and scheduling.

The DBE remains committed to ensuring that every learner is taught by a qualified teacher in an enabling learning environment, and that class sizes are appropriate to improving the quality of teaching and learning outcomes across all phases.