

NATIONAL NATIONAL COUNCIL OF PROVINCES

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 562.

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

Educator/learner ratio in schools

(a) What is the current educator to learner ratio in schools, (b) how many schools (i) adhere, (ii) fail to adhere to the ratio and (iii) are overcrowded, (c) what measures are in place to combat overcrowding in schools and (d) what are the relevant details in this regard in each province?

NATIONAL NATIONAL COUNCIL OF PROVINCES

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 562.

Response

(a) The table below depicts the learner to educator ratio (LER) per province, as at December 2023.

Province	LER	
	State-paid and SGB-paid Educators	State-Paid Educators
Eastern Cape	29,1	34,9
Free State	29,3	33,9
Gauteng	25,8	35,8
KwaZulu-Natal	29,8	33,5
Limpopo	31,8	34,9
Mpumalanga	30,9	35,4
Northern Cape	28,2	32,0
North West	30,0	34,1
Western Cape	26,8	36,7
South Africa	30,8	34,2

Source: School Realities 2023

When considering only state-paid educators in ordinary public schools, the country's average learner-to-educator ratio (LER) stands at 34.2:1, as at December 2024. Six provinces, namely the Eastern Cape, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and the Western Cape, were higher than the national average. However, when counting all educators (inclusive of educators employed by School Governing Bodies (SGBs)), the LER for ordinary public schools nationally was 30.8:1. The LER

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF PROVINCES

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 562.

differs significantly when state-paid educators are supplemented with those paid by SGBs.

It should be noted that currently there are no legislated norms and standards for the learner-to-educator ratio in public schools. The Department of Basic Education applies the “ideal maximum class size” principle in the provisioning norms for each subject, which ranges from six (6) learners per class in the case of music to 37 for subjects that can accommodate large class sizes. These are ideal measures that the sector strives to achieve through continuous improvement in providing resources.

Several factors influence the actual class sizes at schools. These include, amongst other factors, the availability of classroom space, distribution of learners within and across grades, an increase of learners in certain geographic areas, timetabling and school size. Teaching staff includes Principals and other School Management Team members who have reduced contact time. This may influence a higher LER.

(b) It is difficult to determine overcrowding in schools, as it is normally not the school that becomes overcrowded but certain grades and subjects that may be oversubscribed. For an example, classes that are reserved for Mathematics, Accounting or some language groupings may have fewer learners compared to classes of learners registered in the general stream. Some grades (such as Grade 8) tend to have oversubscribed classes when compared to other grades where learners split according to their respective subject choices. Schools can then differ in terms of the number of classes required to resolve such discrepancies due to the above-mentioned dynamics.

(c) It should be noted that overcrowding typically occurs in areas where there are shortages of schools due to migration trends that see more families moving from rural areas to urban areas. The risk of overcrowding in urban areas increases where available land on which to build new schools or expand existing schools is in short supply. These realities are prevalent in the Western Cape and Gauteng with the rest of the provinces affected only in the metro areas, as follows:

- Eastern Cape – East London and Port Elizabeth
- Free State – Bloemfontein
- KwaZulu-Natal – Durban and Pietermaritzburg
- Limpopo – Polokwane

NATIONAL NATIONAL COUNCIL OF PROVINCES

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 562.

- Northern Cape – Kimberley
- North West – Rustenburg and Mafikeng

It must be noted that section 12(1) of the South African Schools Act provides that it is the responsibility of the MEC for Education in province to “provide public schools for the education of learners out of funds appropriated for this purpose by the provincial legislature”. It is therefore important that provincial governments monitor, budget for and ensure the provisioning of sufficient public school infrastructure to meet the schooling needs of communities (whether through the building of new schools, the expansion of existing schools or the rationalisation of existing schools).

South Africa’s LERs are high by global standards, and it is a priority for us to reduce them, particularly in the early grades where individualised attention is most needed. This will require addressing several challenges, including protecting our basic education budgets in a fiscally constrained environment. Recent reports on budget cuts have highlighted how these cuts are impacting LERs, but we are also actively exploring supplementary solutions, such as addressing grade repetition and improving timetabling to optimise class sizes. More details in this regard can be found in the Action Plan to 2024.

In addition to the above, I have requested the Department of Basic Education to prioritise the review of the post provisioning norms to ensure that these are responsive to the existing realities and needs of our schooling system. These norms have not been reviewed 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.

Our priority remains to ensure that every learner receives a quality education, and we are committed to finding solutions that balance the realities of increasing learner numbers with the need for effective teaching and learning.