

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 5273

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5273. Mr V Pambo (EFF) to ask the Minister of Basic Education:

How sustainable are the programmes that some provinces rely on for the preparation of examinations, including study camps, which are high-cost drivers as opposed to creating schools that work?

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Response

The Honourable Member is advised that study camps and vacation classes are indeed high-cost interventions, but they have been used as targeted measures to provide structured support to learners in preparation for the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examinations. These interventions have contributed positively to learner outcomes, particularly in gateway subjects such as Mathematics and Physical Sciences, which had previously shown declining performance. Learners who attend these programmes consistently perform better, benefitting not only from academic support but also from safe spaces, meals, and uninterrupted study time – resources not always available at home.

At the same time, the Minister of Basic Education, Ms Siviwe Gwarube, has made clear that while such short-term measures remain necessary, they cannot replace the need to strengthen the core of the schooling system. Under her leadership, the Department of Basic Education is reorienting the system towards building sustainable improvements in learning and teaching from the earliest grades, so that learners are better prepared long before they reach Grade 12. This is why provinces are increasingly extending support programmes to Grades 10 and 11, while the Department's broader agenda focuses on improving the quality of foundational learning in Grades R-3, which international and local evidence confirms is the strongest predictor of long-term success.

To achieve this, the Department is prioritising systemic reforms that go beyond examination preparation. These include:

- **Improving the quality of foundational learning** by strengthening literacy and numeracy instruction in the early grades, in line with the new national focus on reading for meaning by age 10 and basic numeracy proficiency.
- **Reforming teacher development** to ensure educators are better trained, supported and equipped to deliver the curriculum effectively across all phases.
- **Enhancing curriculum support** with improved Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSM), including digital tools and study guides, that reach learners earlier in the schooling cycle.
- **Strengthening accountability** through the Quality Management System (QMS) and regular monitoring of learner performance to identify and address gaps before they accumulate.

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The Minister has also emphasised that these reforms must create “schools that work” year-round, so that reliance on high-cost exam preparation programmes becomes less pronounced over time. Study camps are therefore viewed as complementary, not primary, interventions: they help to level the playing field for learners in the short term while the Department invests in long-term systemic change.

While study camps and vacation programmes remain valuable as targeted support, the Department’s focus under Minister Gwarube is on ensuring sustainability by addressing the root causes of poor learner outcomes – strengthening foundational learning, enhancing teacher development and improving accountability – so that every child receives quality education throughout their schooling journey, not just in the final year.