

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 5361

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5361. Ms L Managa (EFF) to ask the Minister of Basic Education:

What strategy has her department put in place to improve the performance of learners in (a) Mathematics and (b) Physical Science?

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Response

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) has implemented a range of strategies, guided by the Integrated National Strategy for Mathematics, Science and Technology (MST) Education (2019–2030), to improve performance in Mathematics and Physical Science. These strategies are directly aligned to the Minister's five key priorities for this administration, particularly the focus on strengthening foundational learning, improving teacher development, and enhancing equity of access to quality across the system.

These strategies are described below:

1. **Foundational skills and curriculum interventions:** A strong foundation in literacy and numeracy is essential for later success in Mathematics and Physical Science.
 - The DBE is implementing a comprehensive plan to strengthen numeracy in the Foundation Phase (Grades R–3) and to improve mathematics preparation in the Senior Phase (Grades 8–9).
 - The phased introduction of Mother Tongue-based Bilingual Education (MTbBE) in Mathematics, Natural Sciences and Technology (starting in Grade 4 in 2025) is a key intervention to improve comprehension and learning outcomes.
 - The Minister declared 2023, 2024 and 2025 as successive “Years of Mathematics”, extending to include Physical Science in 2025. This initiative is aimed at breaking historical pass rate ceilings (60%, 70%, and now targeting 75%), with specific campaigns such as *Maths Fridays* to boost learner participation and confidence.
2. **Teacher development and support:** The Minister has emphasised that no improvement in learner outcomes is possible without sustained investment in the quality of teaching.
 - Continuous professional development programmes are being prioritised through the National Mathematics Improvement Programme (NMIP) and subject-specific training.
 - The Funza Lushaka Bursary Scheme continues to prioritise Mathematics and Physical Science graduates, ensuring a pipeline of qualified teachers, especially for rural and high-need schools.

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- More than 335 subject advisors have been trained to provide ongoing support to teachers in Mathematics and Science classrooms across all provinces.

3. **Targeted access and infrastructure:** To ensure equitable access to MST subjects, the DBE has adopted the following targeted strategies:

- Expansion of Focus Schools (Academic, Technical-Vocational, and Technical-Occupational streams) to provide learners with broader access to Mathematics and Physical Sciences.

- Provisioning through the Mathematics, Science and Technology (MST) Conditional Grant, which supports schools with resources, laboratories, teacher training, and learner competitions such as Olympiads.

- Rationalisation of non-viable schools to ensure that all learners, including those in rural and under-resourced areas, have access to Mathematics and Physical Sciences.

4. **Monitoring and accountability:** The DBE continues to strengthen accountability and monitoring mechanisms, as follows:

- The National Development Plan (NDP) targets to increase the number of learners passing Mathematics and Physical Science at Grade 12 level remain a central benchmark.

- International benchmarking through the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) informs diagnostic support for underperforming cohorts.

- Districts identified as underperforming in MST are provided with intensified support, monitoring and oversight to ensure systemic improvement.

The DBE's MST strategy, together with the Minister's emphasis on foundational learning, teacher development and equitable access to quality, is designed to improve learner performance in Mathematics and Physical Science sustainably. The combined effect of these measures is already yielding progress, with notable improvements in mathematics pass rates since 2023, and will remain a key focus of this administration.