

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 5518.

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5518. Mr V Zungula (ATM) to ask the Minister of Basic Education:

(1) What strategy has her department put in place to (a) support learners who are deaf and hard of hearing and (b) promote inclusive education practices in schools;

(2) how does her department intend to address the (a) systemic challenges faced by learners who are deaf and hard of hearing, (b) lack of access to inclusive education and (c) reliance on oral teaching methods in the Mpumalanga province;

(3) what steps has her department taken to ensure that educators in schools for the deaf (a) are proficient in SA Sign Language (SASL), (b) teach in line with the national curriculum and (c) are able to effectively teach learners who are deaf and hard of hearing;

(4) how will her department ensure that learners who are deaf and hard of hearing have equal access to quality education and opportunities for academic and personal development?

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Response

(1)(a) The Department of Basic Education (DBE) facilitates the provisioning of targeted support to learners who are deaf and hard of hearing through the provincial subject specialists for South African Sign Language (SASL) and inclusive education. Support includes direct learner interventions, provincial and district-level curriculum assistance, and online access to shared materials and recorded lessons developed in collaboration with other provinces. Where required, the DBE facilitates through provinces the deployment of subject specialists to underperforming schools to provide direct classroom support and mentorship to teachers. Continuing professional teacher development programmes are offered to teachers in schools for the Deaf in SASL by Provincial Education Departments (PEDs), as part of the implementation of the indicator on the training of teachers in specialised areas in the Annual Performance Plan.

(b) To promote inclusive education practices across the sector, the DBE has included the training of teachers in specialised areas of inclusive education, including SASL, as a key indicator in its Annual Performance Plan (APP). Teachers are trained in inclusive pedagogies that strengthen their ability to accommodate diverse learning needs in line with Education White Paper 6 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

(2)(a) To address systemic challenges faced by learners who are deaf and hard of hearing, the Minister of Basic Education has established a Ministerial Task Team (MTT) to review *Education White Paper 6: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System*. The task team's work focuses on accelerating implementation, addressing gaps in special school resourcing and strengthening accountability for inclusive education outcomes.

(b) The DBE also convenes quarterly National Disability Sector Engagements, bringing together organisations representing persons with disabilities, including DeafSA, to collaboratively identify and resolve barriers to learning.

To address the backlog and progressively realise inclusive education, the DBE and PEDs are implementing the following interventions:

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- Early identification, prevention and intervention: Strengthening the implementation of the Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS), with a strong focus on children from birth to 4 years and in the Foundation Phase. Early identification is critical to ensuring that learners with disabilities receive timely and appropriate support.
- Teacher development in inclusive education: Training of teachers in specialised areas of inclusive education to improve capacity to teach and support learners with disabilities. This forms part of the DBE's Annual Performance Plan commitments, ensuring that inclusive education is available across ordinary and special public schools as envisaged in White Paper 6.
- Mobilisation and placement of out-of-school learners with disabilities: In November 2023, the Director-General issued Circular S28 of 2023, guiding PEDs on placing out-of-school children with disabilities, particularly those in community-based special care centres, into schools. As a result, 226 learners were placed in 2023/24 and a further 403 learners in 2024/25.
- Monitoring and reporting: The DBE tracks the number of learners with disabilities in both special and ordinary public schools as a performance indicator in the Annual Performance Plan. This enables continuous monitoring of progress and informs planning to expand access.

In addition to these interventions, the DBE continues to work with PEDs to:

- Expand full-service schools and special schools to ensure learners with disabilities can access education closer to their communities, particularly in rural areas where backlogs are most severe;
- Provide appropriate Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSM), including South African Sign Language (SASL) resources, to ensure curriculum accessibility; and
- Incorporate inclusive education priorities into infrastructure planning, supported by the Education Infrastructure Grant (EIG), ensuring that new and upgraded facilities meet universal access standards.

(c) While the DBE does not currently collect formal data on the use of oral teaching methods in the Mpumalanga province, the DBE continues to monitor pedagogical approaches through district-level support and curriculum oversight.

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(3)(a) Since the 2023/24 financial year, the DBE has implemented an incremental national capacity-building programme for all SASL teachers, Deaf Teacher Assistants and subject coordinators. The programme includes curriculum-aligned material development, quality assurance and endorsement by the South African Council for Educators (SACE) for 15 CPTD points.

To date, 126 participants from the Senior and Further Education and Training (FET) Phases have taken up the opportunity to attend this programme:

Phase	Financial Year	Participants	Venue
FET	2023/24	45	Garden Court Kempton Park
Senior Phase	2024/25	81	OR Tambo Protea

Further phases will be implemented in 2025/26 for the Intermediate and Foundation Phases.

(b) All developed SASL materials are aligned with the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) and Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs). District subject advisors monitor implementation and provide curriculum guidance. Annual diagnostic reports on SASL NSC examination performance are produced to inform targeted teaching improvement plans.

(c) The DBE employs a collaborative teaching approach, pairing qualified teachers with Deaf Teacher Assistants who act as linguistic mediators between the teacher and learners. This enhances learner comprehension and engagement. The Curriculum and Teacher Development branches within the DBE jointly host week-long workshops to build teacher capacity in assessment, curriculum delivery and lesson design. Teachers leave these sessions with exemplar tasks and methodologies for use in their classrooms.

(4) The DBE is committed to ensuring that all learners who are deaf and hard of hearing enjoy equal access to quality education and opportunities for personal development. This commitment is grounded in the Constitution of the Republic of

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South Africa (1996), the South African Schools Act (Act No. 84 of 1996), and Education White Paper 6, and includes the following key measures:

- **South African Sign Language (SASL) as a Home Language:**

SASL has been formally recognised as an official language of instruction in schools. A national SASL Home Language CAPS has been implemented from Grades R–12, supported by ongoing teacher and official training.

- **Access to Special and Full-Service Schools:**

The DBE works with provinces to strengthen placement processes for learners who are deaf and hard of hearing, ensuring that placement is informed by educational needs and accessibility considerations.

- **Teacher Training and Professional Development:**

Teachers are trained in SASL and inclusive pedagogical practices, supported through ongoing capacity-building workshops and subject-specific mentoring.

- **LTSM:**

The DBE continues to develop and distribute SASL-aligned learning materials, both in print and digital format, alongside assistive technologies such as hearing aids, classroom amplification systems, and visual learning resources.

- **Inclusive Assessment and Examination Accommodations:**

The DBE provides tailored assessment accommodations – including SASL interpretation, extended time and adapted examination papers – to ensure equitable participation in national assessments.

- **Holistic Learner Support:**

Psychosocial support, life skills education and career guidance programmes are offered in collaboration with PEDs, NGOs and parent associations to promote learners' academic and emotional wellbeing.

- **Stakeholder Partnerships:**

The DBE works closely with DeafSA, universities and civil society organisations to enhance teacher development, strengthen advocacy and ensure that policy implementation is responsive to the lived realities of learners. DeafSA actively

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participates in the quarterly disability sector engagements, the most recent of which took place on 23 September 2025.

The DBE continues to advance the rights of learners who are deaf and hard of hearing through an integrated framework of teacher development, curriculum support, assistive technology and inclusive policy implementation – ensuring that all learners can learn, thrive and achieve their full potential in a system that is equitable, accessible and inclusive.