

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 5616.

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5616. Mr S S Zibi (Rise Mzansi) to ask the Minister of Basic Education:

Regarding the low reading and comprehension skills of primary school learners in the Republic, (a) what plans (i) has and (ii) will she put in place to improve reading skills of primary school learners in the Republic, (b) how does the plan target different (i) grades, (ii) provinces and (iii) languages of instruction and (c) how will she address the lingering impact of a lack of reading and comprehension skills for high school learners?

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Response

(a)(i)(ii) Improving reading and comprehension is one of the Minister of Basic Education's five key priorities for the Seventh Administration, specifically under the goal of Strengthening Foundational Literacy and Numeracy.

To achieve this, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) has revised and published the *South African National Literacy Strategy and Plan (2024-2030)*. The strategy builds on lessons from previous literacy initiatives and provides a unified framework to ensure that every learner reads for meaning by the end of Grade 4.

The strategy focuses on four core pillars:

1. Promoting reading in African languages: Developing and implementing a national reading policy that positions African languages as the foundation for literacy development.
2. Expanding access to quality reading resources: Increasing the number of classroom reading corners and school libraries and ensuring that culturally relevant Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSM) in all 11 official languages are accessible to learners.
3. Professionalising reading instruction: Providing continuous professional development and mentoring for Foundation Phase teachers, with particular focus on bilingual and African language literacy.
4. Mobilising parents and communities: Strengthening parental and community participation through reading campaigns, library partnerships and collaborations with NGOs and civil society organisations.

(b)(i)(ii)(iii) The DBE's plan targets different grades, provinces and languages as follows:

- Foundation Phase (Grades R–3): Emphasis is placed on phonics, vocabulary development, and reading comprehension in learners' home languages.
- Intermediate and Senior Phases (Grades 4–9): Focus on strengthening reading comprehension across all subjects ("reading to learn").
- Provinces: Each Provincial Education Department (PED) has developed aligned literacy improvement plans, with particular attention to Quintile 1–3 schools. Districts have also been supported to develop localised plans.

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- Languages: The DBE has advised that it has finalised a *Foundation Phase Minimum Resource Package* of graded readers, workbooks and teacher guides in all official languages. Procurement is underway for delivery ahead of the 2026 academic year to ensure teachers have the right tools to teach reading effectively in the language of learning and teaching.

The Minister has also outlined systemic interventions to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes, particularly in lower quintile schools through:

- Expanding access to quality Early Childhood Development;
- Promoting Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education;
- Improving teacher development, post provisioning and curriculum delivery in the Foundation Phase; and
- Ensuring that schools have the five Ts in place: Time on task, Teacher preparedness, Textbooks, Technology, and Testing.

The DBE is further strengthening collaboration across government, NGOs and communities through a whole-of-society approach. Key partners, such as Room to Read, Nal'ibali, FUNDZA, SAPESI and A Better Africa, collectively form the *Literacy Promotion Collective* and support provincial and district reading programmes.

(c) To address the lingering impact of weak reading and comprehension skills among high school learners, the DBE is implementing targeted interventions including:

- Strengthening language instruction and comprehension across all subjects;
- Using the *Teacher Professional Development Online Platform* to provide SACE-accredited microlearning programmes focusing on reading and language pedagogy; and
- Developing a *National Literacy Toolkit* to coordinate literacy initiatives and share evidence-based practices across the sector.

The DBE recognises that improving reading outcomes is essential to achieving quality education and to preparing learners for lifelong learning. Through strengthened foundational learning, improved teacher capacity and coordinated partnerships, the sector remains committed to ensuring that every child in South Africa learns to read for meaning and to learn for life.