

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 939.

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939. . Mr S L Ngcobo (IFP) to ask the Minister of Basic Education: to ask the Minister of Basic Education:

(1) With the recent surge in safety problems relating to schools, teachers and pupils, what steps has her department taken to provide support to schools to ensure that schools are a safe space for pupils and teachers;

(2) whether there are any long-term interventions that her department is planning to implement to ensure a secure and safe schooling environment; if not, why not; if so, what interventions?

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 939.

Response

(1) With the recent surge in safety problems relating to schools, teachers and pupils, what steps has her department taken to provide support to schools to ensure that schools are a safe space for pupils and teachers

(a) National School Safety Framework

The Department has trained schools on the implementation of the **National School Safety Framework (NSSF)** which is a guiding framework in addressing all forms of violent incidences in schools including gangsterism. The NSSF empowers schools to identify and manage all safety threats in schools, establish school safety committees comprising of stakeholders such as teachers, police officers, school governing body members and learner representative council members. Furthermore, The NSSF also empowers schools to develop incident reporting mechanisms, establish collaborations with external stakeholders such as the South African Police Service (SAPS), the Department of Social Development and civil society organisations, as well as develop school safety plans and policies to respond to safety challenges.

The Department has further developed a digital training on the NSSF and the Protocol on the Management and Reporting of Sexual Abuse in Schools. The training is accredited by the South African Council of Educators and it is granted 15 CPD points. A circular to all schools was released late last year, requiring all School Safety Committee members to complete the training.

(b) Monitoring of School Safety, Sport and Enrichment, Social Cohesion Programmes

The Department conducts annual monitoring of School Safety, Sport and Enrichment, as well as Social Cohesion Programme in 75 districts. The purpose of the Monitoring is to evaluate the level of implementation of school safety programmes in schools by districts and provide the necessary support to strengthen implementation. To date, in the Financial year of 2022-23, seventy-two districts have been monitored.

(c) Protocol to Deal with Incidences of Corporal punishment in schools

The Department developed and published a Protocol to Deal with Incidences of corporal punishment in schools to highlight the abolishment of corporal punishment in schools and to provide provinces, districts and schools guidance on how to deal with issues of corporal punishment. The protocol foregrounds the following areas:

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 939.

- The steps to be taken by provincial, district, circuit and school SMT in reporting the incidents of corporal punishment in schools.
- The complaints procedures are outlined and the measures to be taken at every level of the system are explicit and include the labour relations processes in response to perpetrators of corporal punishment as well as sexual abuse and harassment.
- In line with the NSSF the Protocol further supports schools in ensuring safe and supportive learning environments that use protective behaviour, positive discipline, restorative justice and positive behaviour intervention support systems.

(d) Protocol on the Management and Reporting of Sexual Abuse and Harassment in Schools

The Department developed and published a Protocol on the Management and Reporting of Sexual Harassment and Abuse in Schools, highlight the illegality of sexual harassment and abuse committed against children in schools, and to provide Provinces, Districts and schools guidance on how to deal with issues of sexual harassment and abuse in schools. The Protocol foregrounds the following:

- The various key legislation that protect children against sexual harassment and abuse which include the Employment of Educators act, 76 of 1998, the South African Council for Educators Act 31 of 2000, the Children's Act of 2005 and Criminal law (sexual offences and related matters) amendment act, 2007 (act 32 of 2007)
- The steps to be taken by provincial, district, circuit and school SMT in reporting the incidents of sexual abuse and harassment in schools
- The key stakeholders that schools are required to work with in dealing with cases of sexual harassment and abuse in schools

(e) Partnership Protocol between the Department of Basic Education and the South African Police Service (SAPS)

The Department also has an established Protocol with SAPS to address crime and violence in schools The Protocol has enabled all schools to be linked to their local police stations, SAPS conduct searches and seizures in schools and conduct crime awareness campaigns in schools. Regularly, schools work with SAPS and local community police forums and social workers to address gangsterism issues.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 939.

Constantly, searches and seizures of illegal drugs and weapons are done in schools and anti-gangsterism campaigns in collaboration with the Department of Social Development and the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development are conducted in schools.

(f) Inter-Departmental Campaign on the prevention of Violence, Bullying, Corporal Punishment, Gender-Based Violence, Learner Pregnancy, Drugs and Substance Abuse

The Department and its partner Departments, Social Development, Justice and Constitutional Development, Correctional Services, the South African Police Service and the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies have also embarked on an Inter-Departmental Campaign on Violence Prevention. This Campaign raises awareness on issues such as the prevention of bullying, corporal punishment, gender-based violence, teenage pregnancy and drugs and substance abuse in schools. The Campaign has been championed by the Deputy Minister of Basic Education and is supported by other Deputy Ministers from the partner Departments. The Campaign has been targeting districts with high levels of crime and violence known as hot spots. The Campaign includes build up events that take groups of learners through priority content areas related to violence prevention.

Thus far, the Campaign has been rolled out in five provinces: Gauteng (Gauteng West District), Limpopo (Sekhukhune East District), Mpumalanga (Nkangala District) and the North West (Dr Kenneth Kaunda District), as well as the Eastern Cape (Nelson Mandela Bay). The Campaign also involves Senior Management Teams, School Governing Bodies, learners, parents and ward councillors of the participating schools, in this way the Campaign is a whole school community engagement. The Department intends to continue rolling out the Campaign in other outstanding provinces during this financial year and into subsequent years.

Moreover, districts in collaboration with provincial education departments and civil society organisations also conduct regular awareness raising interventions that explicitly advocate for the prevention of violence in schools. These provincial led programmes include school assembly talks, public debates and dialogues amongst learners. The DBE monitors these awareness programmes through the District Monitoring of School Safety Programmes annually.

(g) Code of Conducts and Policies

The Department compels all schools to develop and adopt code of conducts to address ill-discipline behaviour of learners. School code of conducts are aligned with the Constitution of South Africa and child-protection legislation; and are communicated

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 939.

and adopted/ agreed to by all school stakeholders such as Senior Management Teams, School Governing Bodies and Learner Representative Councils. School codes of conduct are further supplemented by anti-bullying policies, alcohol and drug abuse policies which contribute towards creating safe and enabling environments in schools.

(h) Disaster Risk Assessment Tool

The Department has collaborated with SANTAM in developing a disaster risk management tool. The tool enables schools to identify disaster risk challenges and develop alternatives to those challenges. Currently, the Department is primarily focusing on rolling it out in special schools across the country. To date, the tool was piloted in Limpopo and Free State Provinces. Furthermore, Mpumalanga has also been trained on the tool.

(2) Whether there are any long-term interventions that her department is planning to implement to ensure a secure and safe schooling environment; if not, why not; if so, what interventions?

(a) National School Safety Framework (NSSF)

The Department plans to collaborate with Provincial Education Departments to promote the digital training on the NSSF and Protocol on the Management and Reporting of Sexual Abuse in Schools. The aim is to ensure that a high number of school safety committee members undertake the training and implement it in their respective schools. The Department will further provide additional physical training to some district officials across various provinces, with an aim to strengthen implementation of the NSSF at school level.

(b) Partnership Protocol between the Department of Basic Education and the South African Police Service (SAPS)

The Department intends to work with the South African Police Service and undertake a review of the Protocol. The aim is to identify the weaknesses of the current protocol and develop solutions to strengthen implementation. In the meantime, activities pertaining to the protocol such as searches and seizures will continue to happen in schools.