

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION 2000.**

**DATE OF PUBLICATION OF INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER: 26/05/2023**

**INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER: 19/2023**

**2000. Ms C N Mkhonto (EFF) to ask the Minister of Basic Education: to ask the Minister of Basic Education:**

- (a) What are the main contributory factors to lower primary learners performing poorly in (i) arithmetic, (ii) reading and (iii) writing, (b) what period has the specified poor performance been a negative factor in the performance of her department and the cognitive development of the learners, (c) what turnaround strategies are in place to address the long-term problem, (d) on what date will the strategy be implemented and (e) who are the (i) stakeholders and (ii) role players identified as key participants in addressing the challenge?

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##### **Response**

(a) Learners wrote the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) late in 2021, after almost two years of unprecedented interruption to schooling and learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The PIRLS results show that as much as the pandemic had a negative impact on education in general, reading literacy development was specifically impacted. Further to this, when the Department of Basic Education (DBE) was preparing to receive the Early Childhood Development function in 2022, it conducted the first ever Thrive by Five Index study, which found that only 45% of children were developmentally on track by the age of five, meaning many children start school not school-ready.

(b) In South Africa about 60% of school days in 2020 were lost for children in the early grades. In 2021, most schools still had to operate according to a rotational timetable to comply with social distancing regulations. As a result, some children lost up to 50% of school days in 2021.

(c) The DBE, in collaboration with a team of reading experts from civil society and academia, is reviewing the Integrated Sector Reading Plan. A revised National Reading Literacy Strategy is therefore, being developed; and central to it, is the need to improve the teaching and learning of African Home Languages reading literacy on a large scale, in the emergent and early grade phases (Early Childhood Development and Foundation Phase).

The recent transfer of ECD function from the Department of Social Development (DSD) to DBE, creates an opportunity to improve school-readiness, by helping Early Learning Programmes to become incubators of emergent and early literacy. To this end, we have sourced dedicated funding to empower over 20 000 under-resourced ECD programmes with early learning resources, which will include those that foster emergent and early literacy skills.

The revised Strategy will comprise refining policy to explicitly guide the development of reading literacy, with a primary focus on Home Language literacy; Teacher training, focused on Home Language reading literacy; the provision of culturally relevant and age-appropriate reading resources for both ECD and Early Grades; as well as strengthening collaboration with parents, communities and partners. We will be tracking the implementation through strengthening the monitoring, quality assurance, evaluation and feedback loop.

In relation to the utilisation of the data from PIRLS, we will be initiating an extensive capacity-building programme for officials and teachers, which will be facilitated by an expert Technical Advisory Group (TAG).

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(d) The Strategy is still under development, and will undergo an extensive consultation process before it is finalised. The Department is planning to finalise these processes in the next coming months.

(e) The entire reading ecosystem is being considered; hence, the department is consulting all key stakeholders on the development of a revised strategy.