

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

ORAL REPLY

QUESTION 756.

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756.. Mr A M Shaik Emam (NFP) to ask the Minister of Basic Education to ask the Minister of Basic Education:

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In view of the very high number of learners who are falling pregnant, what measures is her department putting in place to (a) prevent the high teenage pregnancy rate and (b) ensure that learners who start school in Grade 1 complete Grade 12?

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Response

In December 2021, the Department of Basic Education gazetted its policy on the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy in Schools, which was approved by the Cabinet in September 2021.

This policy supports that all learners should have access to comprehensive sexuality education, access to sexual and reproductive health services in schools through the integrated school health programme, and pregnant girls should be allowed to carry on attending classes, as long as they can and then be encouraged to return to school after giving birth, as pregnant girls often drop-out of school, limiting opportunities for future employment and perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

To accelerate the implementation of the policy, the department orientated all its provincial and district officials. The advocacy approach proposed by DBE include all levels of the department such as provinces, districts, circuits, school management team, School Governing Bodies, parents.

It is crucial to note that the policy recognises that not all sexual encounters are consensual; however, consensual and non-consensual sex is defined in the Protocols for Management and Reporting of Sexual Abuse and Harassment in Schools. The policy is therefore, aligned to policies, such as the Integrated School Health Policy of 2012, the National Policy on HIV, STI and TB, including other existing policies and strategies of the department and the sector at large.

We are working with partners that support us in mitigating the impact of learner pregnancy in schools such as:

- UNFPA and UNESCO that support us capacitating the Representative Council of Learners on the LPPM Policy. Supported by UNAIDS, Youth Organisations in 5 provinces have been orientated on Learner Pregnancy Policies
- The USAID and Global Fund programmes that support the implementation of health, care and support services focusing on the adolescent and youth health

The department is strengthening and expanding the coverage of schools implementing the Comprehensive Sexuality Education Scripted Lesson Plans that aim to prevent learner pregnancy and protect our learners from Gender Based Violence. Furthermore, the department is expanding and strengthening the Learner Support Agent Programme and the implementation of the Psycho-social Support interventions for all children. All educators are orientated in the implementation of Protocol for the Management and Reporting of Sexual Abuse and Harassment in Schools as some pregnancies are a result of rape.

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