

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 3624.

DATE OF PUBLICATION OF INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER: 14/10/2022

INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER: 38/2022

3624. Mr B B Nodada (DA) to ask the Minister of Basic Education: to ask the Minister of Basic Education:

(1) (a) What programmes and procedures did her department put in place to mitigate the dropout rate of learners, (b) what do the specified programmes and procedures entail, (c) does each province have its own programmes and procedures, (d) how are the programmes and procedures monitored and audited and (e) what number of learners have been guided to finish their schooling through the programmes (i) nationally and (ii) in each province;

(2) whether she will furnish Mr B B Nodada with the (a) audit and (b) monitoring reports for each of the programmes nationally and provincially?

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 3624.

Response

(1) (a) What programmes and procedures did her department put in place to mitigate the dropout rate of learners,

Ensuring that children attend school during the compulsory schooling age band, and striving to increase the percentage of youths who successfully complete twelve years of schooling, in other words Grade 12, are central to the mission of the Department. A large range of activities and initiatives are aimed at advancing this mission. They have been successful insofar as dropping out before successful completion of the National Senior Certificate has been on the decline, and schooling among children at the compulsory ages has for many years been kept at almost 100%, though there were some setbacks during the pandemic. Successful completion of twelve years of schooling in South Africa is approximately on a par with that seen in other middle income countries, as explained in several of the Department's annual reports on the results of the National Senior Certificate (available on the DBE website).

The problem of learners not successfully completing Grade 12 (or anything equivalent outside the schooling system) should be seen in the context of relatively weak results among many of those learners who *do* obtain the NSC. Here South Africa is behind other economically similar countries. The problem is reflected in the comparably low Grade 9 TIMSS results, even in 2019 and after a couple of decades of improvements, improvements attributable in large part to government's focus on quality schooling. Clearly, these improvements should continue. It is this need that lies behind certain high-level targets in government's Medium Term Strategic Framework, for instance that more Grade 12 youths should obtain the mark thresholds in mathematics and physical science needed to enter university programmes generating critical skills in areas such as engineering, chemistry and financial accounting.

To sum up, existing initiatives have contributed to a reduction in dropping out over many years, and this trend shows no sign of slowing down, as will be explained below. South Africa's international rankings suggest that currently an even larger problem than dropping out is the levels of skills among youths who do succeed in obtaining the National Senior Certificate. While the Honourable Member of Parliament's question relates to dropping out, the response must be understood in this wider context.

Moreover, it is critical to understand efforts to promote successful completion of schooling in terms of the reasons why youths drop out of school. The current research confirms that it is those learners who do not cope with their studies who are the most likely to drop out, and poverty in the home plays a large role here. According the 2019 General Household Survey, 34% of youths aged 16 to 18 are not at school essentially because they are not coping academically. Another large factor, according to this

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 3624.

source, is the 25% of youths indicating 'no money for fees'. Even here, coping academically plays a role: parents and guardians may decide that a child who is not performing well as school is not worth investing in. (See the Department's series of publications *General Household Survey (GHS): Focus on Schooling.*)

In line with the international and local evidence, and in line with the policy advice provided by organisations such as UNESCO, government's strategies aimed at increasing 'survival' to Grade 12 are multi-pronged, with a special emphasis on dealing with the effects of poverty and on improving learning and teaching in the classroom. The following can be considered key initiatives behind past reductions in dropping out, and likely drivers of future improvements in this regard:

- The **National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP)**. This intervention encourages children to attend school, and promotes learning by reducing levels of hunger and malnutrition, which inhibit successful learning.
- **No fee schools**. This longstanding intervention ensures that children and youths in poorer communities are not prevented from attending school due to the inability of the household to pay for school fees.
- Policies on **teenage pregnancies**. Government Notice 704 of 2021 formalised policy on the protection of the schooling of pregnant learners. Among females aged 16 to 18, around 10% did not attend school due to pregnancy, according to the 2019 GHS.
- Ongoing strengthening of the **Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS)**. A more focussed curriculum is one reason that has been put forward as a reason for past improvements in South Africa's performance in international testing programmes – see the Department's *Action Plan to 2024*.
- Efforts aimed at **improving learning in the early grades**. A key government priority is improving reading, and learning and teaching in general, in the early grades. Several interventions contribute towards this, including the shift in the responsibility for pre-schooling from the social development sector to basic education, the Early Grade Reading Study and associated teacher development innovations, and the introduction of the Systemic Evaluation.
- Special **examination preparation support for Grade 12 learners**. Activities here, aimed largely at ensuring that learners leave school with the NSC, include the so-called winter schools.
- The expansion of the **learner-level enrolment and attendance monitoring systems**. The Learner Unit Record Information and Tracking

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 3624.

System (LURITS), the SA-SAMS school management system and the partnership-driven Data Driven Districts (DDD) initiative have all contributed to a more robust approach to monitoring exactly where in the country dropping out is occurring. These systems proved invaluable for providing information on, for instance, where children were not returning to school during the pandemic.

(b) what do the specified programmes and procedures entail,

There is extensive publicly available reporting on all the initiatives listed above. The Honourable Member of Parliament should please consult past annual reports of the Department, and other reports dealing with specific initiatives. The NSNP, as a recipient of a DBE conditional grant, is extensively reported in the annual reports of the provincial education departments. The basic planning framework for no fee schools is regularly updated – see for instance Government Notice 1730 of 2022. Materials relating to the ‘annual teaching plans’ developed to cope with the impacts of the pandemic and its after-effects, are available on the DBE website. How data were used to understand patterns of dropping out during the pandemic can be found in a few reports on the DBE website, including *Pandemic-related losses in contact time across seven provinces according to SA-SAMS data* and *The COVID-19 pandemic, enrolments, dropping out and attendance explained*.

(c) does each province have its own programmes and procedures

Provinces all have some initiatives of their own, but alignment across the various programmes within each province, across provinces, and between the national and provincial levels is continually promoted, in particular through the HEDCOM structure (functioning in terms of the National Education Policy Act) and its sub-committees.

(d) how are the programmes and procedures monitored and audited

The overriding framework for this is provided by the Public Finance Management Act and the National Education Policy Act. Some initiatives have been evaluated externally by the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME). This includes the NSNP, the CAPS and support to Grade 12 learners. The relevant reports are available in the Evaluations Repository of DPME. Departmental annual reports, which provide details on the whole range of initiatives, are audited with respect to both spending and outcomes.

and (e) what number of learners have been guided to finish their schooling through the programmes (i) nationally and (ii) in each province;

It would be impossible to attribute successful completion for individual learners to specific interventions, as they are highly inter-connected. However, it seems clear that

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION 3624.

improvements in terms of successful completion of Grade 12 are the result of the variety of programmes aimed precisely at this outcome. According to the last NSC report of the Department, the percentage of youths successfully completing Grade 12 improved from 45% in 2005 to 57% in 2019, and number of matriculants continued to rise beyond 2019, despite the pandemic. The difference between 45% and 57% translates to around 130 000 additional youths achieving the 'Matric' in 2019 relative to 2005.

(2) whether she will furnish Mr B B Nodada with the (a) audit and (b) monitoring reports for each of the programmes nationally and provincially?

All relevant audit and monitoring reports are available online. The responses provided above point the Honourable Member of Parliament to specific documents.