

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

ORAL REPLY

QUESTION 399.

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399. . Ms N G Adoons (ANC) to ask the Minister of Basic Education: to ask the Minister of Basic Education:

What (a) are the critical observations that her department has identified in the management of early childhood development since it became its responsibility and (b) are the preliminary priorities that her department will undertake to progressively improve early learning which is critical for the cognitive development of children?

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Response

(a) There is currently a multitude of challenges in the early childhood development sector and they can be divided into three main categories: (1) systemic challenges; (2) challenges in having access to early learning opportunities for all children; (3) challenges in the quality of early learning opportunities provided. The main systemic challenges entail the historic underfunding of the sector, lack of infrastructure support to ECD centres, overly burdensome regulatory framework, the lack of a management information system, the lack of a quality assurance system and under-qualified practitioners. The challenge with access is that only 58% of 3-year-olds and 75% of 4-year-olds are currently accessing early learning opportunities. Ideally, we would like all 4-year-olds to be able to access early learning opportunities. Finally, the Thrive by Five Index highlighted the quality constraints in the ECD sector, with only 44.5% of 4-year-olds being developmentally on track in their early learning outcomes.

(b) The Department of Basic Education is prioritising the systemic challenges, recognising that addressing these challenges will create an enabling environment in which access and quality challenges can be addressed. Work is ongoing in addressing the regulatory challenges through the Second Children's Amendment Bill and the review of the Norms and Standards for ECD registration. The DBE is also in the process of developing a Management Information System for ECD to support more accurate planning. A **Public Expenditure and Institutional Review** is also in the final stages of development, and will support the case to increase funding to the sector systematically over time to National Treasury. This year the Department will also commence with the development and field-testing of the tools and instruments that can be used in a quality assurance and support system. Finally, the Department, along with key role players in the sector will be developing a strategic Human Resource Development Plan.