

# **Basic Education Budget Vote Speech for the 2024/25 Financial Year, Delivered by the Honourable Minister of Basic Education, Ms Siviwe Gwarube, MP, to the National Assembly, Cape Town**

**15 July 2024**

Honourable Speaker  
The Deputy Speaker  
Cabinet colleagues and Deputy Ministers present  
Honourable Members,  
Basic Education sector stakeholders,  
And most importantly, the people at home – good afternoon.

My Department, Deputy Minister Mhaule and I would like to express our gratitude to the National Assembly for the opportunity to table the **2024/25 Budget Vote 16**.

House Chair, this Budget Vote takes place in unique circumstances in our country.

Unique in that we are operating within the Government of National Unity environment, which is important and historically significant because it reflects the will of the people.

Chair, we also operate under extremely difficult fiscal conditions which require innovation, creativity and firm financial discipline.

As we navigate these unique times, we are reminded of our shared commitment to uplift and empower every child in South Africa through the provision of quality education, especially every child living in poor communities. It is our constitutional mandate to do so, to give meaningful expression to the right to basic education enshrined in our Constitution.

The power of education to change one's life trajectory cannot be understated.

Nje ngamntu osuka ezilalini zase Qonce, eMpuma Koloni, ndiyazazi iimeko abantwana noo-tishala abaninzi abafundela, befundisa phantsi kwazo.

Ngaphezu koko, ukubaluleka kwemfundo esemgangathweni ndiyazela apha kum.

Ngendingamanga apha namhlanje ukuba ndandingazange ndifumane ingqeqesho nemfundo esemgangathweni.

However, the access that I had came at a great cost to a single mother who taught at a local rural school.

Access to quality basic education should not be a privilege only afforded to some.

There are far too many children in our country for whom a quality education is out of reach and for whom life chances are severely diminished.

We simply cannot shrink away from our responsibilities to them.

Chair, this is not a speech in which to announce detailed implementation plans.

It is rather a speech about the sober and studied allocation - on a rational basis - of the funds which the fiscus has made available.

Although the usual 5-year planning cycle does allow for changes, given that this Government was sworn in halfway through the school and academic year, there is little to be gained and it would be irresponsible to change programmes and initiatives already in operation.

However, going forward, I must make it clear that I will not implement policies or programmes without evidence of their value in our concerted efforts to improve the quality outcomes of the system.

Our learners deserve nothing less.

Anyone who looks with a critical eye at the work of this Department will not find much fault with its policies and plans.

However, we must go far beyond the policies and plans.

We must objectively assess the outcomes of this Department and the impact we are making in the lives of learners.

This is especially important in a context where the public purse is under severe pressure.

If this Department does well, it creates a path to success for many who have been excluded from the economic advantages of having a good education.

Therefore, we must be bolder, ambitious and set high evidence-based targets for ourselves.

In this regard, I have begun the work of critically assessing our targets and milestones as a Department.

For example, the Department projects that the desired outcome for School Governing Body effectiveness for 2024/2025 is 50% of schools.

This is nearly 30 years after the South African Schools' Act was enacted.

Given the critical role of school governing bodies in relation to much of what our public schools do, this is simply not good enough. We must do better.

In my short time in this office, I have already been approached by parents of learners reaching the end of Grade 4 who cannot read for meaning or manipulate simple numbers.

They want to know how we will reconcile that reality with setting targets to increase the National Senior Certificate pass rate or improve the percentage of Bachelor Passes.

I therefore applaud those components of our national system who take seriously how important it is to increase the reading and calculating ability of our youngest learners, making sure that every learner has a fair chance of staying the course to Grade 12.

These challenges, articulated by parents, are reflected in our current achievement levels in international benchmarks in which we participate.

While there has been some improvements, our literacy and numeracy rates remain unacceptably low.

My team and I will obsess about getting learners at all levels in the system to be able to read for meaning.

Chair, going forward, I intend to review the implementation, funding and desired outcomes of all programmes carefully.

These programmes simply cannot be allowed to be implemented if they stand little chance of succeeding or having an impact on the lives of learners.

My reading of the 5-year plan for the Department up to 2024/2025 is that there were a number of activities in its Impact Statement for which outcomes and indicators were provided when the plan was launched.

Many of these outcomes and indicators were scheduled to be achieved prior to 2024. In my coming to understand my portfolio better, I will certainly be asking to see these results.

For instance, Grade 9 performance in Mathematics in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) was set to improve from 372 in 2015 to 420 in 2023.

As part of the discussion within the Council of Education Ministers, I will certainly be asking my colleagues to look at this information carefully.

The link between monitoring and improvements is obvious, but it is easy to confuse increased monitoring with automatic increased performance.

This is simply not the case.

Chair, this is another area where I will be critically assessing whether our efforts to monitor quality in the system are truly driving improvements.

To address these and other pressing education issues, I intend to establish an advisory council representative of the basic education system as soon as possible.

This needs to include all our key stakeholders across the sector, as well as experts in key disciplines.

This council, once up and running, will be an invaluable resource in ensuring that our efforts to strengthen our education system are targeted, evidence-based and informed by best practice.

As we continue to build for the future, Chair, we must recommit to *building a solid foundation for a quality and efficient basic education system*, from ECD, through the Foundation, Intermediate and Senior Phases, to the Further Education and Training (FET) Band.

In line with this commitment, we have identified **five key** priorities for the 7<sup>th</sup> Administration that will inform our decision-making in this portfolio.

1. Firstly, we will intensify efforts to **improve access to and quality of early childhood development**, recognising that the formative years are critical to laying a strong foundation for our children's education journey.
2. Secondly, we are steadfast on **improving literacy and numeracy skills across all phases of schooling**.
3. Thirdly, we will increase efforts to **improve access to and the quality of inclusive education** for learners in our most vulnerable communities and learners with special education needs. It is our duty to ensure that our education system is accommodating and supportive of *all* learners.
4. Fourthly, we will intensify efforts to **improve access to and the quality of training and professional development opportunities available to our school management teams and teachers**. Teachers are the backbone of our schooling system. Given the many and varied challenges that our teachers and principals are required to respond to in their daily

work, we need to ensure that they are supported to achieve the quality learning outcomes we so desperately need.

5. And finally, but certainly not least, we will be working tirelessly to **improve the safety and quality of schooling environments** for our learners and teachers.

This includes reducing overcrowding in classrooms, improving access to electricity, water, and adequate sanitation facilities, and removing inappropriate structures, such as pit latrine toilets.

In particular, I will carefully review the recently published Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure to ensure that they offer greater clarity and drive meaningful improvements in this regard.

We cannot have learners in danger of drowning in pit toilets or learning in inappropriate structures, 30 years into our democracy.

Chair, now please allow me to highlight the following in relation to the ***Budget Vote 16 – Basic Education for the 2024 MTEF period*** –

The overall ***2024/25 MTEF budget allocation*** for the Department of Basic Education is ***Thirty-two point three billion Rand*** (R32.3 billion), an ***Increase of 7.4%*** from the 2023/24 overall allocation.

The breakdown of the budget by Education Programme, is as follows –

- The allocation for ***Administration increased by 3.0%*** from last year's allocation to ***R607.5 million***.
- The allocation for ***Curriculum Policy Support and Monitoring increased by 16.0%*** from 2023/24 to ***R4.089 billion***.
- The allocation for ***Teacher Education Human Resource and Institutional Development is R1.439 billion***.

- **Planning Information and Assessment** is allocated **R15.995 billion**, an **increase of 8.0%** from the 2023/24 allocation.
- The allocation for **Educational Enrichment Services** increased by **5.8%** from last year's allocation to **R10.129 billion**.

The **overall allocation for Conditional Grants is R26.041 billion** – an **increase of 10.4%** from that of 2023/24. The specific allocations for Conditional Grants are as follows –

- The **Mathematics, Science and Technology (MST) Grant**, is allocated **R443.8 million**, a **15.8% increase** from last year's allocation.
- **Infrastructure delivery** – which continues to be funded through the Education Infrastructure Grant (EIG) – is allocated **R13.7 billion**, an **increase of 11.4%** from 2023/24 financial year.
- **Accelerated School Infrastructure Development** Initiative – also known as the School Infrastructure Backlog Grant – is allocated **R1.641 billion**, which is also inclusive of the allocation for Sanitation Appropriate for Education (SAFE) Initiative.
- **HIV and AIDS**, whose purpose is to support South Africa's HIV and TB prevention strategy, has been allocated **R249.7 million**, an **increase of 16.8%** from last year's allocation.
- The **National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP)** has been allocated **R9.798 billion**, an increase of 5.6% from the 2023/24 allocation.
- The **Learners with Severe to Profound Intellectual Disabilities Grant** receives **R278.9 million**, an increase of **7.1%** from the 2023/24 allocation.

The **overall allocation for Earmarked allocations and transfer payments is** R3.178 billion. The specific allocations for these funds include the following

- The allocation for the **Funza Lushaka Bursary Programme** is **R1.266 billion**.
- The 2024/25 subsidy to **Umalusi** has **increased by 2.4%** from 2023/24 to **R166.9 million**.
- The **National Senior Certificate Learner Retention Programme**, also known as the Second Chance Programme, is allocated **R38.6 million**.
- **Workbooks**, including Braille workbooks for visually impaired learners, have been allocated **R1.214 billion**.
- The **South African Council of Educators (SACE)** is allocated a subsidy of **R16.4 million**, an **increase of 5.4%** from last year's allocation.
- **Early Childhood Development** has been allocated **R150 million** for Resource package for 2024/25 financial year.
- **Early Childhood Development Nutrition pilot** has been allocated **R197 million** for Resource packages for the 2024/25 financial year.

Chair, we wish to remind this House that our *Action Plan to 2024: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2030*, which gives expression to the Constitution, the National Development Plan, as well as the continental and international conventions, continues to provide the moral imperative and a mandate to Government to make the social justice principles of **access, redress, equity, efficiency, inclusivity** and **quality** education opportunities, widely available to all citizens.



## **Conclusion**

There is growing acknowledgement that deliberate and sustained systemic efforts must be made to improve the quality of teaching and learning in South African schools.

At all times, we must remind ourselves about the non-negotiables for the Basic Education Sector.

As with the Government of National Unity, our national and provincial partners and stakeholders in the basic education sector need to work collaboratively, creatively and earnestly, irrespective of our different backgrounds and beliefs, to ensure that we make meaningful strides in strengthening and enhancing our existing systems and do everything possible to improve the life chances of our children.

The best interests of our learners need to guide our collective efforts in this regard.

Madam Speaker, from next week, we will meet many of our stakeholders, starting with the teacher unions, the School Governing Body associations, the principals' associations, national organisations responsible for learners with special needs, as well as independent schools' associations. These are the partners and stakeholders who do the work on the ground so their wise counsel is appreciated and will inform our work.

In the coming weeks, I will also be visiting each of our nine provinces to engage with my provincial colleagues and their respective departments to ensure that my work is informed by the provincial realities and needs that they are experiencing.

We wish to thank our Chairperson and the Honourable Members of our Portfolio Committee whom we met last week. They gave us invaluable input and committed to holding us accountable against targets and goals set.

It was encouraging to hear that the committee also intends to conduct oversight across the country. Their observations are critical. Not only to the work of this House, but to the work of the Department.

Siyafuna amalungu ePalamente ayozibonela kumaphondo onke. Kaloku, silapha nje, sithunyiwe ngabemi beli ukuba sizobathethelela. Yiyo lonto ke ndiwuxabisile umsebenzi wePalamente.

I also wish to thank the Deputy Minister, Dr Reginah Mhaule; the Director-General, Mathanzima Mveli and indeed the DBE team as a whole.

They have made the onboarding process over the past two weeks smooth and demonstrated what can be done when we are brought together by a common goal of improving lives.

Mandiyigxininise lendawo ka DM, uDr Mhaule. She is a reliable and valued member of our team and I look forward to working with her.

Let me end by thanking each and every stakeholder who plays an active role in the delivery of education in our country each day:

- from our schools and their principals, educators, staff and governing bodies;
- to the teacher unions, governing body associations and independent school associations that support them,
- to the civil society and community-based organisations and to our parents.

Please join me on my learning journey.

With your support, we can improve the quality of education outcomes in South Africa for this generation and further generations of learners.

Siyabulela.