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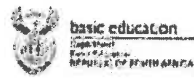
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Press Release
29 May 2014

Employing predicted learner numbers in rural schools at start of school year remains a particular challenge

Department of Basic Education notes release of SAHRC Report on LTSM Delivery

The Department of Basic Education has noted the report released today by SA Human Rights Commission into the delivery of Learner and Teacher Support Material (LTSM).

The recommendations in the final report have been overtaken by time. DBE has advanced significantly in all of these areas since the commission of the SAHRC report by parliament.

Since the publishing of the preliminary report over a year ago in April 2013, the department engaged with the report and began addressing actions. The DDE as well as Provincial Education Departments have implemented many significant changes in its LTSM acquisition procedures. Most of the findings and recommendations contained within the report are already being implemented or form part of the Departments plans going forward.

Response to findings and recommendations of SAHRC

The challenges identified in the SACMEQ III report released in 2007 indicating LTSM penetration of 45% nationally was addressed extensively by DBE. Already in 2012 CFM took a decision that there must be one textbook per learner for every subject. The implementation plan indicated that this must be achieved by the 2014/2015 financial year and the relevant budgetary allocations were increased accordingly. By the end of the 2013/2014 financial year LTSM penetration had reached 90%. DBE is confident it will meet this target.

Rural to urban migration, late or non-registration of learners by parents, parents who choose to move their children from one school to another or the relocation of families, among others remains a challenge.

While it is simple to accurately project learner numbers in urban schools that reach their capacity prior to the new school calendar year, it becomes more difficult in rural areas where the above mentioned persists. Admissions are therefore only finalized at the beginning of February and this is when shortfalls in specific LTSM are identified.

The process of schools reporting learner statistics and LTSM shortages is followed up with ordering from publishers, printing and then delivery and distribution to schools this process takes two to three months. However teaching and learning can still take place and the schools will have the text books they ordered the previous year. This only applies to discrepancies between orders placed the previous year and actual number of registered learners.

DBE is working with the former Department of Communications (Telecommunications and Postal services) to ensure the speedy roll out of telecommunications infrastructure to all schools.

DBE has provided all PEDs with a sector wide plan to guide the procurement of LTSM. Guidelines for placing orders of text books are provided to schools as early as March the year before, orders are to be finalized by October and mop up or top up takes place from November to February. Principals who do not adhere to this will be held accountable by Provincial Departments.

Seven of the nine provinces have aligned themselves to the sector plan as of 2013, which encompasses the central procurement of LTSM at a provincial level. In those provinces Section 21 schools have opted to be part of the provincial central procurement due to the savings made from purchasing at economies of scale. The retrieval of textbook (which should have a five year life span) is also the responsibility of schools and district officials.

SETA is currently assisting the DDE to develop a digital system that interfaces with provinces for the specific purpose of ordering, monitoring delivery as well as retrieval of LTSM. This is over and above similar systems that are already in place in some Provinces. It is hoped that the systems will be able to integrate effectively.

LTSM for learners with special needs has long been a priority for DBE to the extent where we have broadened the definition of LTSM for special needs learners to include assistive devices. One of the challenges faced by the department is the capacity of the country to manufacture and deliver Braille materials on time. DBE is addressing this issue with the Department of Arts and Culture as well as Braille SA and the disability society. DDE are also in the process of looking at alternative solutions, including the use of ICT.

The Department has made great strides to resolve the challenges that have existed in the delivery of learner and teacher support material.

Statement issued by Elijah Mhlanga, Department of Basic Education, May 29 2014

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