



12 May 2020

Joint media statement: The Department of Basic Education must present clear and comprehensive plans to the public

Equal Education (EE), Equal Education Law Centre (EELC) and SECTION27 welcome the Department of Basic Education's (DBE) [announcement](#) that final plans on the phased re-opening of schools will be presented publicly tomorrow, Thursday 14 May.

Over the last two weeks, inconsistent and contradictory information has been communicated by the DBE, leading to confusion and anxiety. Tomorrow's briefing by Minister Angie Motshekga presents an opportunity to clarify and provide vital detail on what teachers, caregivers and learners should expect in preparation for the re-opening of schools, as well as the implications of some grades of learners possibly being at home for an extended period of time.

It has been over seven weeks since schools were first closed. While we understand that learners' usual access to education has necessarily had to be impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown, the DBE is still required to ensure that the limitation on the right to basic education is reasonable and justifiable in terms of the Constitution.

We are calling on the DBE to ensure that the plans presented by Minister Motshekga address the following key issues, failing which the DBE's plans would be constitutionally deficient:

- 1.1. Full details of the impact of the phased re-opening of schools benefiting from the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP), both for learners returning to school and learners who may have to remain at home. Undocumented learners do not currently benefit from the child support grant, and are in need of meals that they would ordinarily receive at school. The suspension of the NSNP is a regressive measure that must be fully justified.

- 1.2. The impact of the phased re-opening of schools on learners with disabilities, including (a) details on the resources and support that will be provided both to learners with disabilities returning to school and learners who may have to remain at home, and (b) detailed plans regarding special school hostels.
- 1.3. Clear time-bound plans and budget information detailing the identified need and provision of the following resources to schools, learners and educators:
 - 1.3.1. Protective personal equipment (PPE);
 - 1.3.2. Adequate water and toilet facilities at schools;
 - 1.3.3. Scholar transport;
 - 1.3.4. Additional classroom space and teachers;
 - 1.3.5. Psycho-social support.
- 1.4. Clear plans detailing the implications of and measures that will be put in place to support caregivers, teachers and learners in circumstances where the DBE's "non-negotiables" for a school re-opening has not been met. We note that some provincial education departments have [indicated](#) that they will not have received PPE before the tentative date proposed for principals and teaching staff to return to school.
- 1.5. Clear plans detailing the resources that will be provided to learners at home (and their teachers) to support teaching and learning, taking into account the prolonged impact of school closures on the right to education.
- 1.6. Clear plans outlining the implications of a change in alert levels within or between provinces or districts on the phased re-opening of schools, and alternatives to be implemented in these circumstances.

- 1.7. Full details of the scientific evidence on which the DBE has relied to inform its decision-making and planning.

It is imperative that beyond the media briefing, these plans and documents are made publicly available on the DBE's website for effective engagement. In addition, caregivers, teachers and learners must be informed, regularly, about these plans through the use of broadcast media. This is necessary to ensure transparency, accountability and a level of confidence among caregivers, learners and teachers in the DBE's plans.

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