

1 June 2020

**Joint statement: SECTION27, Equal Education Law Centre and Equal Education immensely distressed that Department of Basic Education has failed to fulfil its promises to enable schools to re-open safely**

SECTION27, the Equal Education Law Centre and Equal Education are profoundly concerned that the Department of Basic Education (DBE) has failed to carry out the planned preparation for the safe re-opening of schools, or to provide effective leadership and communication to the learners, school staff and caregivers in dealing with the Covid-19 crisis. With last minute [announcements](#) about schools reopening for learners on 8 June 2020 instead of 1 June 2020 coming from the DBE late last night (31 May 2020), there is renewed uncertainty about the way forward for schooling. What's more, some provinces - notably the Western Cape - seem to be giving [directives](#) that contradict this announcement, and maintain that schools will open today.

According to a statement issued by the DBE, the Council of Education Ministers (CEM) is concerned about the state of readiness of schools in some provinces to reopen because of issues such as the non-delivery of water and personal protective equipment (PPE).

In a media briefing on 30 April 2020 the Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga announced that Grade 7 and Grade 12 learners would return to school on 1 June 2020. This has subsequently been [published](#) in the Government Gazette on Friday, 29 May 2020.

The briefing provided a broad outline of the measures that would be necessary for each school to re-open to ensure health and safety and social distancing at schools. The DBE undertook to provide PPE to schools, as well as water tanks where needed, mobile classrooms to schools facing overcrowding and to deliver mobile toilets to schools reliant on pit latrines.

A month has passed since this announcement. If plans were implemented as they were intended to be, all schools should have been properly sanitised, and PPE and the promised infrastructure ought to have been delivered in time for the re-opening date determined by Motshekga.

During the time since the April announcement, the DBE and provincial education departments have failed to provide clear and sufficient details on progress of the procurement and delivery of necessary sanitising materials, PPE and infrastructure. The Sunday Times [reported](#) yesterday of a sudden backtrack in the DBE plans, following opposition from teacher unions and school governing bodies to the re-opening of schools, on the basis that many are not ready.

The failure of the DBE and most provincial education departments to comply with their undertakings and meet their own deadlines in terms of preparing schools for re-opening, unfortunately mirrors their ongoing failures to provide textbooks, essential school infrastructure like toilets, and scholar transport.

It is also undoubtedly frustrating for learners, school staff and caregivers who are already extremely anxious.

We urge the DBE to engage in meaningful consultation with learners, school staff and caregivers, and to move expeditiously in ensuring that all deliveries occur at all schools. It is critical that the uncertainty surrounding the re-opening of schools is resolved in the interest of the right to basic education for all learners in South Africa.

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**To arrange an interview, contact:**

Jay-Dee Cyster (Equal Education Communications Officer) 082 924 1352

Tad Khosa (EE Law Centre Media and Communications Coordinator) 081 346 0180

Julia Chaskalson (SECTION27 Communications Officer) 083 440 2674